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The New Criterion *October 1985*

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James Aitchison has published two collections of poetry, *Sounds before Sleep* and *Spheres.*

Dick Allen's most recent book of poems is *Overnight in the Guest House of the Mystic* (1984).

Bruce Bawer wrote on Doris Lessing in the September issue of *The New Criterion.*

Edward Case died during the summer soon after the poems in this issue were accepted for publication. In his earlier career he had published poems in various literary journals, and written reviews for *The Wall Street Journal.* The poems in this issue of *The New Criterion* are drawn from a collection of recent work that he was preparing for publication at the time of his death.

Donald Gallup is the editor of *The Flowers of Friendship: Letters Written to Gertrude Stein* (1953), which was reprinted in 1979 by Octagon Books. For many years he was Curator of the Collection of American Literature at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University.

James Gardner reviewed Natalia Ginzburg's *All Our Yesterdays* in our September issue.

X. J. Kennedy's *Cross Ties: Selected Poems* was recently published by the University of Georgia Press.

Jane Kenyon's poetry has appeared in *Poetry* and *The New Yorker.*

Roger Kimball reviewed Sartre's war diaries in the September issue of *The New Criterion.*

Samuel Lipman is the music critic for *Commentary* and the author of *The House of Music.*

Leslie Norris has published nine books of verse and one of short stories.

Jed Perl has written for *Art in America, Aperture,* and *Arts Magazine.*

Robert Richman is Poetry Editor of *The New Criterion.*

Alan Shapiro's second book, *The Courtesy,* appeared in 1983 (University of Chicago Press).

Vernon Young is working on a book about travel writing.

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The sorrows of Kurt Schwitters

by Hilton Kramer

There are artists who, although not perhaps of the very highest order, nonetheless define issues and create a vision so central to the aesthetic dilemmas of their time that they come to occupy a place and to exert an influence out of all proportion to the scale of their actual achievement. Kurt Schwitters, whose work is currently the subject of a major retrospective exhibition, is a figure of this sort.[1] At once immensely gifted and possessed of a quirky, original intelligence, he was also curiously limited in the principal endeavors of his career. Schwitters's limitations, moreover, were neither inadvertent nor involuntary. They were deliberately chosen, and remained crucial to what he achieved. His special quality is therefore to be found almost as much in what he refused as in what he embraced. He is one of the authentic "little masters" of the modern movement, yet owing to the circumstances of his career—especially his association with Dada—he is an artist fatally easy to misconstrue. The fact is, without some grasp of Schwitters's quarrel with Dada—and of what it was in Dadá that he refused—his work can hardly be understood. It might even be said that without some grasp of that quarrel, Dada itself cannot be fully understood.

In this respect, as in others, the exhibition organized by John Elderfield at the Museum of Modern Art has been something of a landmark in the history of the artist's reputation. Although the exhibition, which numbered well over two hundred items, was rather too large, I think, for the size of Schwitters's achievement, it had the great virtue of giving us a definitive account of that achievement for the first time. And in Mr. Elderfield's comprehensive monograph on the artist, published to accompany the exhibition, we have been given a study of Schwitters which does more to clarify both his art and its place in the art history of his time than anything else yet published.[2] It is not, I imagine, a monograph that will be enthusiastically welcomed in all quarters, for it makes few concessions to the mythology which has long enclosed Schwitters's work and the whole Dada movement in a penumbra of avant-garde piety. Schwitters was, of course, one of the quintessential figures in the avant-garde which flourished in Europe in the period between the two world wars. Yet what that avant-garde represented and what sorts of dissensions and debates divided its members are questions which have by no means

1 "Kurt Schwitters," organized by John Elderfield, was shown at the Museum of Modern Art in New York from June 10 to October 1. This fall it will be seen at the Tate Gallery in London (November 6, 1985-January 5, 1986), and then at the Sprengel Museum in Hannover, West Germany (February 4-April 19, 1986).

2 *Kurt Schwitters* by John Elderfield, published for the Museum of Modern Art by Thames and Hudson (clothbound, $45; paperbound, $22.50).

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been settled. On the contrary, considering the fame of the artists involved it is remarkable how little such questions have been seriously studied. To this aspect of Schwitters's life and work, Mr. Elderfield's monograph makes a most important contribution. If only for its concluding chapter, entitled "Postscript: Merz and Modernism," *Kurt Schwitters* should be required reading for every student of modern art.

Schwitters was born in the provincial city of Hannover in 1887, and it is unlikely that he would ever have taken up residence elsewhere if the Hitler regime had not forced him into exile in 1937, the year in which the Nazi campaign against "degenerate" art came to a frenzied climax. As it was, he escaped arrest that year by fleeing to Norway, which he had been visiting for some years and where he now continued to work until the German invasion compelled him once again, in April 1940, to flee for his life. This time he made his way to Britain, where he was promptly interned as an enemy alien. After his release in October 1941, he eventually settled in the Lake District where he died on January 8, 1948 at the age of sixty. In the last months of his life he lived mainly on a grant from the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

He had begun as a painter of portraits and landscapes, and he continued to paint from nature throughout his career, even eking out a living of a sort from the tourist trade in the Lake District in his last years. This is but the first of the many paradoxes which surrounded Schwitters's career—that the artist who achieved an international renown as an exponent of abstract collage and assemblage and as the author of a similarly "abstract" species of poetry never abandoned his allegiance to a mode of pictorial expression generally condemned as moribund in the avant-garde milieu with which his name and his art are so closely identified.

Another of these paradoxes is to be found in Schwitters's relation to the politics of his time. There can be no question but that Schwitters was deeply affected by the revolution which came to Germany in 1918-1919 in the wake of the First World War and led to the establishment of the Weimar Republic. During the war he had been conscripted to work as a mechanical draftsman in an ironworks. Painting and poetry could be pursued only in his spare time. The revolution changed all that; it liberated him as an artist. He was thirty-one years old. "He quit his job to devote himself full time to being an artist," Mr. Elderfield writes, "saying that the revolution had brought with it a sudden release from the tensions and frustrations of the war, and the chance for a new start." And this meant, among much else, something really new in his art. For it was only then that Schwitters began for the first time to make the abstract collages and assemblages, using bits of refuse and found objects—"new art forms out of the remains of a former culture," as he said—which are his most distinctive and original work. Yet despite this new sense of personal freedom which the revolution gave Schwitters, its political program appears to have meant little or nothing to him, and it was his adamant refusal to attach his art to the politics of revolution that caused the ideologues of the German Dada movement to condemn him as hopelessly bourgeois.

The charge was not without some foundation in truth, either. Which is yet another paradox in the life of this avant-garde artist. In his early thirties, while launching himself as a member of the artistic vanguard in a nation that was soon to be as famous for its sexual revolution, its radical politics, its social turmoil, and its economic breakdown as for its legendary innovations in the arts, Schwitters lived with his wife and infant son in the comfortable home of his parents—his father, Mr. Elderfield reports, was a "well-off shopkeeper and property owner"—and appears to have comported himself, in everything but his artistic vocation, according to the conventions of his class. Thus, while Schwitters's collages, made of cigarette wrappings, tram tickets, advertisements, and other throwaway materials, and his poems, composed of similarly juxtaposed fragments

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of overheard conversation and newspaper clippings, were quickly taken to represent the very essence of the avant-garde spirit—his poem, "An Anna Blume," published in *Der Sturm* in 1919, became for a time the object of a cult—their author was content to remain firmly attached to all the outward trappings of provincial middle-class life. The more incendiary members of the avant-garde had ample reason to be furious with him. Schwitters could not be budged from the course he had set for himself. Even though it was the revolution that gave him his artistic freedom, he seems to have understood from the beginning that his art did not belong to it—that art, as he conceived of it, had a destiny independent of all such political goals, and that his own art, in any event, issued from the kind of inner privacy which was likely to be at odds with the revolutionist's vocation.

It was Schwitters's insistence on giving priority to aesthetic considerations (or, as Mr. Elderfield puts it, his "absorption in fine art") that was at the heart of his quarrel with the Dadaists.

> At its most basic [Mr. Elderfield writes], Dada was an assertion of personal freedom and individual rights outside of systems, tradition and conventional mores, and was therefore to be measured as much on personality as on good works. But the merits of an artist's work were also to be judged by these same standards, which is why art itself, as a systematic, traditional, and conventional activity, posed a special kind of threat for a number of Dadaists, and caused Schwitters to be ostracized as he was.

In a further passage, Mr. Elderfield analyzes very precisely not only the issue on which Schwitters declared his independence from Dada ideology but the much larger issue which continues to haunt both the creation of art and the discussion of it down to the present day.

> More than any earlier modern movement [he writes], Dada made an outright attack on the peculiarly modernist preoccupation with aesthetic values and particularly on the grounding of those values in exploratory technique. Dada sought to remove emphasis from what had been basic not only to modernism but to Western art since the Renaissance: the individual controlling hand in dialogue with a circumscribed medium as the source of aesthetic value and the moral center of art. Dada attacked this "formalism" in a way that was clearly unpalatable to Schwitters, who found inspiration in a medium that he had made his own.

And in a particularly important passage in this text, Mr. Elderfield writes:

> In Dada . . . image content was more important than style. Art became ideology objectified, in a way that was antithetical to the spirit of original modernism . . . . In effect, [Dada] split modernism into two camps, dividing the traditional or "classic" modernists from the neo-modernist avant-garde. It was because Schwitters was at heart a "classic" modernist that he never quite belonged with the avant-garde.

It is, of course, this split which still very much divides the art world today between those who, in one way or another, remain committed to the standards of modernist probity and those who reject them in the interests of "ideology objectified." It is worth noting, too, that what Mr. Elderfield characterizes as the "neo-modernist avant-garde" has evolved in our own day into a movement more and more likely to sail under the banner of postmodernism.

It is, then, largely as a "classic" modernist that Schwitters has been presented to us in this retrospective exhibition. This marks an important revision in our understanding of his principal work—the diminutive collages and only slightly larger assemblages and constructions to which Schwitters arbitrarily gave the name *Merz*—for it shifts attention away from the raw materials used in the art (the tram tickets, cigarette packs, et al.)

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and concentrates instead on the formal syntax which governed their deployment in the picture-making process. This shift is not made in the interest of diminishing the importance of those raw materials—which, in the case of Schwitters's *Merz* pictures, is just about impossible, anyway—but in order to re-establish the artist's own attitude toward them. Generally speaking, it is the exaggerated attention given to the "trash" which Schwitters used in making his pictures that has made them so fatally easy to misconstrue. Isolated from the formal use he made of these trash materials, the *Merz* pictures have often tended to be characterized—one might even say, sentimentalized—as a species of pictorial anarchism, whereas in truth it is their rigorous formality, a formality which the very nature of these materials would appear to resist and subvert, which is their most distinguishing feature. What especially appealed to Schwitters in the *Merz* pictures was precisely the incongruity—even, if you will, the comedy and pathos—to be observed in the successful transformation of such perishable materials into the higher order of an imperishable aesthetic object.

The name *Merz,* by the way, was a nonsense syllable which Schwitters culled from the word *Kommerz* (commercial) in a bank advertisement he had cut up for use in one of the collages he first exhibited at the Sturm gallery in 1919. Thereafter he adopted it as the generic name for all of his abstract pictures and constructions—because, as he said, "I could not define them with older concepts like Expressionism, Cubism, Futurism or whatever." He used the name *Merz,* that is, to define a genre as well as a point of view, and it also served as his personal response to Dada, itself a nonsense word which came to have very different implications. In this respect, the name *Merz* signified for Schwitters his intention to remain aloof from Dada's extra-aesthetic activities, and thus, in effect, to establish a parallel one-man movement of his own.

The need to distinguish his *Merz* pictures from those produced by the Expressionists and the Cubists was important to Schwitters, and not so much because he rejected the aesthetic premises of Expressionism and Cubism, which he clearly did not, as because his *Merz* pictures still owed so much to them. Before he turned to collage, the first modernist pictures which Schwitters created were, after all, in the Expressionist style. These were the first pictures we encountered in the Modern's retrospective, and although they are mainly interesting as a kind of prehistory to the artist's maturity, something of their spirit—an element of Expressionist dolor, perhaps—persists as a sort of subtext long after Schwitters abandons the Expressionist manner. When he does abandon it to make his first pasted and nailed pictures, what he turns to as an alternative is a formal syntax and a material medium that owe much, if not quite everything, to the kind of Cubist collage which had been the common property of the international avant-garde since Picasso and Braque first created it in 1912. In one of their aspects, Schwitters's *Merz* collages and constructions must be seen as a personal variation on and development of this Cubist invention, which was central to everything he achieved.

In another aspect, they also pay a certain homage to the emphasis which the Futurists placed on the dynamism and romance of machine civilization. Schwitters doesn't really embrace the Futurist vision, however. In some respects he can even be said to invert it, for he is far more sensitive to the poignancy and loneliness and fugitive lyricism of modern city life than the Futurists, with their incurable appetite for noise and bluster, could ever bring themselves to be. Yet they sounded a note that he recognized as authentic, and he responded by rephrasing it, so to speak, in his own key. Which is pretty much what he did with everything he appropriated from the art of his time.

It was out of all of these artistic and historical materials—as much, certainly, as out of tram tickets, scissored advertisements, and other trash—that Schwitters created his *Merz* collages and constructions and made his distinctive contribution to abstract art.

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The special quality of feeling he brought to this work was unlike that of anyone else, however. For in the finest of his *Merz* creations Schwitters was a sort of abstract elegist. "My basic trait is melancholy," he once said. If there is a touch of laughter and even mockery in his work, there is an even more emphatic atmosphere of tender sorrow and loss. Schwitters is a dreamer in the wasteland of the modern metropolis who constructs little elegies to its unacknowledged tristesse. Every discarded and forgotten object that comes to hand is a token of feeling to be savored and commemorated. Given his materials, one always expects to find a greater element of satire in Schwitters than is in fact there, for his natural inclination is to sublimate his anger and his despair in a kind of defiant exquisiteness. Even when, in the last years of his life, he turned to a political theme—in a collage called *Hitler Gang* (circa 1944)—he turned it into the same kind of dolorous chamber music that had been his forte from the outset.

An artist so preoccupied with the elegiac mode and so steeped in the sensibility of sorrow and loss is not well placed, however, to undertake tasks of utopian reconstruction, and it is for this reason, I think, that Schwitters's forays into pure Constructivist sculpture in the Twenties tend to be devoid of his special quality and genius. It was interesting, of course, to see what Schwitters had made of his efforts to conform to this more impersonal mode of abstract art. Yet the section of the Modern exhibition devoted to this phase of his work had about it an atmosphere of anonymity that was chilling. It is in the very nature of Constructivist art to discard all those tokens of memory and association that were an essential part of Schwitters's poetic personality. His purely formal capacities were certainly equal to the challenge which the Constructivist aesthetic posed for him, yet he had to leave out too much of himself in the final result. He was not at heart a utopian visionary—which is what, in some form, Constructivism requires that its artists be. Constructivism could not accommodate either his lyricism or his melancholy.

It was a somewhat different story, it seems, with Schwitters's *Merzbau* constructions—those vast environmental structures which he undertook to create for himself in the last two decades of his life. One cannot be sure, of course, because the three *Merzbau* constructions which Schwitters worked on—first in Hannover, then in Norway, then in England—have all perished, and we have no firm way of judging them from the photographs and fragments which have survived. What Schwitters appears to have aspired to in these vast constructed enclosures was the creation of a private world that would stand as a physical correlative of his own relation to the outside world. In a sense, the *Merzbau* idea is a monument to the artist's own alienation, and thus takes its place as the most ambitious of the many expressions of melancholy and despair which occupied him throughout his career. There is, moreover, something at once appalling, poignant, and admirable in the spectacle of the ailing, exiled artist lavishing his last energies and his last hopes on these monuments to his own isolation. The *Merzbau* projects surely constitute a heroic episode in Schwitters's saga, but they remain a biographical and historical datum; they are casualties of the terrible history which drove Schwitters into exile, and there is no use pretending that we can now know what sort of artistic achievement they might represent. The display of fragments, photographs, plans, etc. devoted to the *Merzbau* constructions in the Modern show inevitably had about them an eerie, funereal feeling. It was a sad note on which to end an exhibition otherwise so buoyant in its affirmation of the lyric spirit in art.

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From the journals of Thornton Wilder

selected and edited by Donald Gallup

Introduction

The American novelist and playwright Thornton Wilder was born in Wisconsin in 1897 and died in his Connecticut home in 1975. Reared in China and the United States, he graduated from Yale University in 1920. In the Twenties he was a teacher of French at the Lawrenceville School, and in the Thirties a professor of English at the University of Chicago. His first novel, *The Cabala,* was published in 1926. His second, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey,* published the following year, won Wilder the first of three Pulitzer Prizes and made him a figure of international renown. His other novels include *The Woman of Andros* (1930), *Heaven's My Destination* (1935), *The Ides of March* (1948), *The Eighth Day* (1967), and *Theophilus North* (1973).

Beginning in the Thirties, Wilder also achieved a considerable success as a playwright. Two of his plays—*Our Town* (1938) and *The Skin of Our Teeth* (1942)—won Pulitzer Prizes and have remained familiar classics. A third, *The Merchant of Yonkers* (1938), was successfully revised in 1954 as *The Matchmaker.* (It was made into the musical comedy, *Hello, Dolly!,* in 1963.) In 1950-51, Wilder served as the Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry at Harvard University, delivering a series of lectures on the classic American authors. In 1965, he was awarded the first National Medal for Literature at the White House.

In his "Editor's Note" for the forthcoming publication of *The Journals of Thornton Wilder, 1939-1961,* Donald Gallup—Wilder's literary executor—writes as follows about the history of the *Journals*:

"In the manuscript materials left by Thornton Wilder—and now among his papers in the Collection of American Literature of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University—are various groups of diary and journal entries dating from 1912, 1916-17, 1922-33, 1939-41, and 1948-61, with two additional brief notes of 1969 . . . .

"The entries of 1939 to 1941 (fifty-one manuscript pages) and the major series dating from 1948 to 1961 (539 manuscript pages) are the source for the present selection . . . .

"In a typical Journal entry, Wilder begins with a heading that includes the number of the entry in its given sequence, the place and date of composition, and a title indicating the subject matter. I have retained all of these, silently supplying the year in the dateline when it is lacking . . . ."

The following excerpts from the *Journals* have been selected by the editors of *The New Criterion.* (Footnotes supplied by Gallup are numbered.)

—Hilton Kramer

Copyright © by the Union Trust Company, New Haven, CT. Excerpted from *The Journals of Thornton Wilder, 1939-1961,* selected and edited by Donald Gallup, to be published this month by Yale University Press.

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1. February 1, 1940. On Moralizing.

. . . There is a universal repudiation of moralizing; but for a thoughtful person it is as difficult to do as to receive. The diction of the moral life is saturated with two distasteful elements, truth and hypocrisy. The hypocrisy, as the old adage tells us, is a homage to the truth. The laws of morality are common knowledge, are truisms. They only live with force when they are applied to situations of crisis. The reason we resent preachiness is that it is tendered to us during occasions when we are in a state of complacency. It is a part of the practice of great preachers to prepare in the minds of their hearers, during the first portion of their sermons, such a state of crisis: the contemplation of mankind's *misère*. The brevity of life, the omnipresence of fallibility—against such a background they are able to introduce later the eternal truism.

The recurrent moralizing tags of the Greek tragic poets become understandable to us in the light of this rule. The atmosphere of the tragic performance has been lost to us—its solemn religious earnestness, its terrifying reductions of the action to the first principles of the passions, its air charged with the presence of supernatural beings. Under those conditions a character may say "Short is the life of man," or "Let me not be counted among the wicked," and the truism strikes upon the ear not only with the power of the truth but with the surprise of novelty.

31. Quebec, October 26, 1940.
On My Play [*The Skin of Our Teeth*].

Here this week I've been writing the Second Act of my play, all wrong, and knowing that I was writing it all wrong. It presents problems so vast and a need of inspiration so constant that all I can do is to continue daily to write it *anyhow* in order to keep unobstructed the channels from the subconscious and to maintain that subconscious in a state of ferment, of brewing it. The wrongness of the present text lies in the fact that the scenes of the triangle situation and the family conversation are homely and realistic. It may well be that before I "bring them up" I will be obliged to bring down the portentous size and the furious energy of the present opening and perhaps of some of the First Act; but that I shall not touch until I've found ways of recasting these intermediary scenes into moment-by-moment myth and a thing that one could call gigantism if it weren't also human generalization.

This attempt to do a play in which the protagonist is twenty-thousand-year-old man and whose heroine is twenty-thousand-year old woman and eight thousand years a wife makes me see all the more clearly how necessary for Joyce it was, with a similar self-assignment, to invent a grotesque tortuous style of his own. Happier ages than our own could do it—or some aspects of it—in the purity of the lyric, the morality play, or in the relative simplicity of the *Prometheus Bound* and the *Oedipus*; but in this century and, above all, in these times, there has been added to the difficulty that of avoiding the pathetic, the declamatory, and the grand style. The only remaining possibility is the comic, the grotesque, and the myth as mock-heroic.

I have one advantage: the dramatic vehicle as surprise. Again by shattering the ossified conventions of the well-made play the characters emerge *ipso facto* as generalized beings. This advantage would no longer be mine twenty years from now when the theater will be offering a great many plays against freer décors; the audiences will be accustomed to such liberties and the impact of the method will no longer be so great an aid to its myth-intention. (My play will be just as valid then, but what it has lost in surprise will be replaced by its prestige, by the audiences' knowing "what it's all about.")

The challenge that has been issued, then, by the accumulated weight from the previous act of the play's proposal to represent Man and Woman, and by the columnar moments

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already established in Act Two—the President's acceptance of his nomination; Mrs. Hobson's reminiscences on the history of marriage; Miss Atlantic City's outburst to the audience and, particularly, her closing consolation to her partner that men and women are "of straw"; the radio address to the other convening Orders; and the final storm and the cries down the theater aisle (I have not yet been able to "realize" the scene of the Fortune-teller)—must be met throughout. The intervening material need not be as freighted with emphasis as thought, and should not be, but the theatric invention must tirelessly transform every fragment of dialogue into a stylization surprising, comic, violent, or picturesque. Here lies the increased difficulty over the writing of *Our Town,* where the essence of the play lay in the contrast between the passages of generalization and those of relaxed and homely tone.

Had I not all my writing life been convinced of the fact that the subconscious writes our work for us, digests during the night or in *its* night the demands we make upon it, ceaselessly groping about for the subject's outlets, tapping at all the possibilities, finding relationship between all the parts to the whole and to one another—had I not long been convinced of this I would have been the other night. Turning over the play in feverish insomnia, I suddenly saw that there, waiting for me in the structure of the Act, was a felicity, integral, completely implicit and yet hitherto unforeseen: since the Orders of the Birds and the Fishes were simultaneously holding their conventions probably nearby, how ready they were to have their representatives present, two-by-two, for the entrance into the Ark, which for months has been established as the closing moment of the Act.

A few more such revelations and I shall be building a mysticism of the writing process, like Flaubert's: that the work is not a thing that we make, but an already-made thing which we discover.

And yet how difficult it is—returning to the paragraph before the preceding—to restate those intermediary scenes. Even granted that my theatric invention could furnish an unbroken chain of strikingly novel devices, revitalizing representations of the material of our daily yet saecular life, how great is the risk that, placed side by side, these passages over-fatigue the spectator and finally stupefy the attention, which through them is supposed to be gazing at the condition of life itself.

One's hand falls to one's side in discouragement; all one can do is to trust that the subconscious has foreseen that peril too; that the already written has circumvented it, and that I shall be permitted within the next months to read the solution of this problem.

34. Quebec, November 1, 1940.
Difficulties with My Play
[*The Skin of Our Teeth*].

The play seems—as it is being said of the Italian army in North Africa these days—to have bogged down again, halted in irresolution and a sense of lacking any vitality.

Undoubtedly, there is a real subject for a play there.

I seem to have lost it among misjudgments in manner, in whimsical digressions, and among a number of stated positions which are not real to me, which are insincere. For the present leaving out of consideration the Second Act, all of which may not *be real* to me, how about the First?

Yesterday and today I have been rewriting the opening of the First—not only as to manner, which is relatively unimportant, as that will come right when I have grasped with conviction the central intention of the Act.

This being the most ambitious subject I have ever approached *(sic!)* I am faced as never consciously before with the question: do I mean it? In this case, in what part or level of myself am I actually interested in such a problem (problem for literature, that is; hence, burning problem for the self) as the struggles of the race and its survival?

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Have I been "making up" emotion, and contriving an earnestness? Is that why my play has bogged down? (Only now as I write this note can I see that that is a misstatement of the question: it is like saying "if you could save a thousand Chinese by cutting off your right hand and leg, would you do it?" *i.e.,* indubitable and unrealizable; a concept graspable by the human mind only in the specific occasions that vitalize it.) No, it is a subject as real as any other, as dramatizable as any other. It is not so much that one might charge it with an emotion one hasn't got, as that one might charge it with a false pumped-up emotion—or an anemic emotion which ekes out itself in whimsical fancies. In fact, it's not so much a matter of emotion at all, as it is of seeing, knowing, and telling.

In so far as I see, know, and tell that the human race has gone through a long struggle (Act One) it is legitimate that I cast the consideration in the form of a modern man and his home; and precisely to avoid false heroics—in this time, of all others—that I cast it in comic vein.

My difficulties thereafter are three: (1) *Simplicity.* To state this is sufficient. With what dismay I see some of the passages I wrote this afternoon, passages which, under the guise of theatric liveliness, uprooted the play from its forward drive and introduced digression and inexpedient "color." My old dread of being "boring," my reluctance to trust to strong subject matter.

(I wish I could reread *Candide*—where the problem was not unlike—but though there are many French bookstores in this town, *Candide,* by reason of the Catholic censors, is unprocurable here. *N.B.* I think I should read Rolland's *Liluli,* too; I gather on the wind that that belongs to the same category.)

(2) *Working perseverance.* These two years of taking up subjects and dropping them, of desultory reading *as* an evasion from writing, of mixed activities have undermined what little collection-to-work I used to have. I particularly find great difficulty in fixing my mind on the play as a whole; that exercise *sine qua non* of composition. I seem only able to "flag the reluctant and tired horses of my mind" to seeing instantaneously the whole play when I am out walking and have walked long and hard.

(3) *Inspiration without emotion.* This is the only phrase I can find to describe the moments when the material is really forwarded. The great danger these days is that when I do get "inspiration" it comes in tides of tears which not only are, as formerly, the legitimate tears of nervous excitement, but . . . bring with them the distortion of the material into a host of humanitarian, "pathetic," didactic directions which are not fundamentally real to me, but which are self-admiring or substitute self-pitying interferences.

Will these difficulties clear up?

I cannot say. I may say on my own behalf that the subject (and the treatment, which is the only way I could treat it) is indeed difficult; that, at least, I bring to it my sense of making the whole stage move and talk, and my characteristic style, which weaves back and forth between the general and the particular.

If I am bogged down, the reason is not far to seek: my mind's daily thinking for twenty years has not been of sufficient largeness to prepare me to rise to the height of this Argument.[1]

44. Neshobe Island,[2] Lake Bomoseen, Vt., December 2, 1941. On Act Three of My Play [*The Skin of Our Teeth*].

Again bogged down and frightened. Last month in New Haven not only did I tighten up Acts One and Two—I think I can say that with the exception of a short passage in Act Two they are finished, and good—but I

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1 Cf. Milton, *Paradise Lost,* Book I, lines 22-26:

> ". . . What in me is dark
> Illumine, what is low raise and support;
> That to the highth of this great Argument
> I may assert Eternal Providence,
> And justifie the wayes of God to men."

2 Owned by the critic Alexander Woollcott.

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wrote a "through" Third Act; but it is not right.

The employment of the "Pullman Car Hiawatha" material[3] is: (1) Dragged in indigestibly; (2) Insufficiently related to the surrounding material; (3) An incorrect statement of the central intention of the Act—is *that* intention, by the way, to be "save the cultural tradition?"—and (4) It smacks of the *faux-sublime.*

To go back to first principles: what does one offer the audience as explanation of man's endurance, aim, and consolation? Hitherto, I had planned here to say that the existence of his children and the inventive activity of his mind keep urging him to continued and better-adjusted survival. In the Third Act, I was planning to say that the ideas contained in the great books of his predecessors hang above him in mid-air furnishing him adequate direction and stimulation.

(1) Do I believe this?

(2) Have I found the correct theatrical statement for it?

(3) Is it sufficient climax for the play?

Taking these in turn: (1) I do believe it. I think the only trouble with it is that *there* is the point where the vast majority of writers hitherto would have planted the religious note. It's not so much that I deny that religious note as that it presents itself to me only intermittently and in terms too individualistic to enter the framework of this place.

(2) The statement that the ideas and books of the masters are the motive forces for man's progress is a difficult one to represent theatrically. The drawbacks against the "Pullman Car Hiawatha" treatment are that (a) the Hours-as-Philosophers runs the danger of being a cute fantasy and not a living striking metaphor, and (b) . . . I cannot find citations from the philosophers' works that briefly and succinctly express what I need here.

3 In "Pullman Car Hiawatha," published in the volume *The Long Christmas Dinner & Other Plays in One Act* (1931), minutes appear as gossips, hours as philosophers, and years as theologians.

At all events, I have begun work as usual by excision. Out go the "people who had died in the house"—we have had enough of the common men who preceded our Antrobuses. Out also goes, I think, the natural history, though maybe that might be useful, not as giving the arch of the natural world that surrounds us, but as making more easy the identification of Stars and Hours with Philosophers and Artists. Out go the allusions to the various calendars—partly because it is so difficult to choose *one day* to cite. Into the earlier part of the Act should go, if I can keep Hours-Philosophers, much more reference to Mr. Antrobus's books.

Couldn't the quarrel between Henry and his father hang on Henry's contempt for the books that had led his father astray?[4]

418. [October?] 1948.
Toward the German Lectures[5]:
The Theory of the Unique Occasion.

Metaphysically, man lives in a world of threats and ambushes. At any moment the Dreaded Thing may overwhelm him. (Develop.) This is true of him even in times of great political and national security. How much more is it true of such times as we are living in now. But in this discussion today we are not talking of man in his social and political relationships, but of the Human Condition in general.

Man's behavior under these conditions of potential catastrophe we know well: his resources against fears include: (1) Religion, which is finding a security for the spirit against evil; (2) Creation in the technics, which is the protection of physical man against evil (*N.B.* in their extreme expression the above two are incompatible—as the

4 *The Skin of Our Teeth* was completed by January 1, 1942 and, after try-outs in New Haven and Baltimore, opened in New York at the Plymouth Theatre on November 18, 1942.

5 Lectures given at the University of Chicago Center in Frankfurt am Main in November and in Berlin in December 1948.

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countries of the Orient, particularly India and China, are continually showing us); (3) Frivolity—distraction—*i.e.,* occupation so continuous that it excludes and evades all awareness of the potential catastrophe; (4) Art. Art hangs balanced in suspension between two resources: it both offers a flight and relief from dread by being as completely occupying as frivolity is, and it also, like religion, promises an escape from the insecurity of the human condition by offering a promise that there is order and relatedness in the world.

It is this double nature of art which particularly strikes us in the theater. The audience desires that frivolity release [it] from presentiments of evil, but it also desires that beauty which is the promise of relatedness. In one sense all beauty is one; but in another sense we know [that] the characteristic beauty of painting, of music, of lyric poetry, of architecture can be distinguished. And the characteristic beauty of the theater arises from the representation of human lives, as thousands of writers on the theater have reminded us, of human lives in conflict—in farce and comedy, in drama, and in tragedy; conflict is basic to the theatrical vitality.

Development: hence audiences do and do not wish to "enter into" a play which reminds them of the potential evil. They wish either or both the diversion (the self-forgetting absorption) and the beauty (the assurance of relatedness), without paying the price of gazing at the possibilities of catastrophe.

The theater has many ways of giving them this diversion-without-dread and this beauty-without-pain: (1) It can give a beauty so merely pictural that the audience can take escape into the fact that "it is only a picture" (so last night at [García Lorca's] *Yerma*); (2) It can turn comedy into comment, *i.e.,* not action but reflections upon action, bloodless puppets (and not symbol-marionettes), and tragedy into melodrama, *i.e.,* blood is not really blood, but paint; (3) It can represent the action as "unique occasion," *i.e.,* a precise moment in the past, long past and over, a museum-glimpse into a passage in historic time . . . .

430. Hamden, [Ct.,] November 6, 1949. Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*

Cleanth Brooks having told me this is the best of the Faulkners, I have bought it and read it for the first time.

Written in quivering emotion and recounted, by refraction, by a series of narrators, all of them—except Quentin's father—in a state of quivering emotion, the book runs the risk momently of collapsing into ignominious absurdity. "Outrage" and "outraged" are the motif-words of the book and the author himself seems to be in a state of staggered outrage: that this vast iniquity had taken place in the land (the land whose other possession was the highest conceivable adherence to honor and pride and chivalry), and that the consequences of the iniquity were like the ancient concept of fate and retribution.

It has then the character of an "epic," the role of the supernatural being played by this operative doom. And the incongruity that ultimately saps its power is that we are all too aware that the author by reason of his state of quivering and outraged emotion is not capable of viewing the evils with that wide and removed view which alone can compass the actions of gods and men. It is as though we were hearing the fall of the House of Atreus told by a voice that was feverish and shrill, scandal-mongering-nosey, and a little prurient.

Just as *Light in August* trembled with anticipated horror and ecstasy toward the castration of a Negro, so *Absalom, Absalom!* does a frenetic dance about a finally impeded incestuous coupling of a white girl and her partially-Negro half-brother—having previously fainted with outrage at three miscegenations: Thomas Sutpen and the mother of Clytemnestra *(sic!)* Sutpen; Thomas Sutpen and his first wife; and Charles Bon and his New Orleans mistress.

The incongruity (the agitated narrator and the vast subject) betrays the author into grandiloquence. It would be rash to say, without having reread the others, that it is Faulkner's most grandiloquent book. This

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dizzying rhetoric rises to its most fantastic pitch when it approaches the subject of sex . . . . The one thing an author is not allowed is to look at the tragic background of life and the constitution of human nature for evil and absence of spirit *with surprise,* for surprise denotes that he is newly come from a conviction that it was otherwise. It is in this sense that Faulkner and the South are unequipped for tragic matter. They were first surprised that the North called them guilty; they are now surprised to discover that they *were* guilty, and with that comes the green adolescent surprise that the human race can be indicted for guilt. It is surprise, therefore, that takes pleasure—the wrong kind of pleasure—in contemplating violence and lust. It is at once consolation and absolution to cry out in horror, to say nothing of a sort of relish in the abasement.

But this is a notable book. It marches to the terrific climax of its closing lines:

> ". . . Why do you hate the South?"
> "I dont hate it," . . . *I dont hate it* he thought . . . *I dont. I dont! . . . I dont hate it!*

The large articulated machinery of the plot does illustrate the motif that the institution of slavery set in motion its own retribution. The last lines are preceded by another theme, stated as though it were a baleful prophecy, that the descendants of miscegenation will gradually cover the country, and "conquer the Western hemisphere"—presumably as semi-idiots, like Jim Bond—. That such descendants are assumed to be idiots or incapables is the Southerner's assumption. There is a sneer at George Washington Carver in the book.

494. Deepwood Drive, [Hamden, Ct.,] January 18, 1951. The Poe Lecture: First Search.

Leaving aside one moment the question of whether or not Poe had a first-rate or a tenth-rate mind, let us inquire what kind of mind it was:

It was active. It does not even seem to have been subject to that predictable laziness of the speculative, inventive, "bright" type.

It was bold. One could have wished that, like Diderot's, it had ranged into a kind of "dry-run" nihilism; but that would have meant writing material which one could not publish.

Its curiosity (the greater part of its curiosity) was directed toward the morbid—and one divines that even E.A.P.'s attempt to describe, in [the prose poem] *Eureka,* the beginning and end of all things was linked to his passion to understand the appalling disorders in his own nature. (One divines it from the fact that the overtures to his tales of horror constantly echo those cosmological speculations.)

It was in earnest. This has been much doubted and there are grounds for doubt; they proceed from the *magazinist* character of much of the work: the brisk adulation of nonentities; the mechanistic descriptions of the creative act, etc. But much in Poe must be read in the light of two things: his monetary necessities, and his resort to stimulants. Much that we attribute to bad taste, parochial culture, poor education, and shallow thinking should be charged instead to journalistic haste and to writing while drunk.

D. H. Lawrence thinks only of sex when portraying Poe[6]—at great length: Poe killing Virginia Clemm, and Virginia-Ligeia locked with Poe in a vast struggle of passion and will. There is no doubt that there was a serpents' nest of turbid eroticism in E.A.P.; but I should like to show that the intellect—as voracious passion—also drove and harried him, and precisely as reaching out for order and air and explanation from the subterranean vaults (his recurrent image) of his nature . . . .

One does not demonstrate that a writer is great by showing how remarkably he achieved a little artistic success through overcoming fearful handicaps. But there is a greatness there. My business is to explain

6 In his *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923).

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our sense of his greatness where so much of the material is obviously *manqué*. I am quite ready to acknowledge a greatness "in the wings," *in posse*; we must, however, find it on the page . . . .

499. Deepwood Drive, [Hamden, Ct.,] January 22, 1951. Poe's *Eureka*: Some Last Left-over Observations.

. . . Is Poe trying to impress himself? Even if it could be proved that the entire work is half-baked as physics and as metaphysics, is it half-baked as *character*? Is Poe a trumpery fellow given to posing before us and before himself as a master mind and inevitably cheating at it? No, he is truly *engaged:* the evenness of the style, the absence of flashy diction, the clarity without condescension, the freedom (after the opening) of conscious emphasis on the grandeur of his subject matter, even the composure of the deliberate or implied allusions to his own genius—all this reassures me that *he takes his powers for granted* and does not feel under the necessity of reassuring himself. Only in these last four pages where he announces that *he is God* (conceding at the same time that so are we all) do we enter a new register: these probably spring from an anguished protest against death, against extinction. The entire work preceding these pages may be a tissue of ignorance, but it is not histrionic. It has the dignity of its selfless application to its problem.

Perhaps the chief thing to say about it is that it betrays an impressive urgency to find and express Unity . . . .

It suddenly occurs to me that it may have been from this work that Paul Valéry—who has written so large-mindedly about it—may have acquired his habit of underlining the guide-post phrases in his prose.

The American characteristic of *Eureka* is not that so brief and so non-technical [a] cosmological treatise should have been written (rare though that must be); nor that it should be written by one apparently so limitedly trained for such a work; but that it should—the body of it—be written in a tone which implies that the ideas are *self-evident.* For an American there is no strain in the thoughts that project this time and this place *toward* infinity.

I presume that Diderot may have approached this type of speculation at some time. Even the idea of such pages by him throws a light on Poe's; Diderot could not have sustained it long without recoiling from the audacity—he who had endless *audace* in re-inventing our *moeurs.* Voltaire would have engaged in it only as polemics, though he could sustain a considerable gravity on great subjects. [G. E.] Lessing's flight would have stayed within the limits of the technical knowledge at his disposal. Only an American could feel that such a journey was natural—that is, was within the *rights* of any man—because vast simplifications are of this hemisphere.

Maybe it is one of the consequences of a Protestant thought-world that any man has a *right* to explain the universe without being deferential to Authority.

581. SS "Saturnia," October 30, 1951. Jean Genêt: *Oeuvres Complètes*; Volume II: *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs*; *Miracle de la Rose*; and Two Poems. (Marie-Louise Bousquet tells me that Volume I—not out yet—will consist of Sartre's essay on Genêt; that this volume (Gallimard, 1951) was put out as a trial flight to see whether the police would suppress it.)

My acquaintance with Genêt began at Aspen. Saul Colin sent a copy of the English translation of *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs,* bound in soft leather at thirty dollars—an edition which has had a most extensive circulation throughout the United States. I read the first thirty pages with astonishment and contempt, but was presently caught up into amazed admiration.

Now I have this French text, which I must presently throw overboard.

First, a work of prodigious art, not only as brilliant writing but as establishment of

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tone, as *éclairage:* the oscillation between subjective lyricism and the most detailed description of his world is managed with infinite resource.

Second, a work of unbroken artifice and ruse. As literature, all *livresque,* all conscious; and as *tableau de moeurs* and as personal document, all calculation.

Yet it is hard to imagine how this material could have been recounted differently unless it were by someone who was not "of it." Sartre obviously copied a part of it in the first section of his tetralogy[7]; but this is by an insider and that is the overwhelming strangeness of it. The blurb says that *"s'il faut lui trouver un maître, ce n'est pas Villon mais Rimbaud."* It may be Rimbaud for the poems—which seem to me very bad and archy-artificial; but these novels have not the authenticity of Rimbaud. No, the master is Proust—and for pages on end the tone is Proust; and not because of the *moeurs* involved; but Proust's is the rhetoric and Proust's the analysis of motivation and, above all, Proust's is the guile.

Genêt had been burglar, then male prostitute (for males); as new arrival at a house of correction he had had to pass the usual ordeal—to be *violé*—by scores of the older inmates. And it happened that, this once in a hundred thousand cases, the *voyou* had the endowment of a great writer.

Again the blurb says this is *"l'itinéraire d'un homme qui a visé à transformer la malédiction qu'il subissait en salut."* Not *salut.* Out of this abjection, forever inexpiable, he has built up a vast mythology, a vast proclamative front; he uses the language of chivalry and of religion. These executed murderers are heroes and saints; much is made of their "purity" and of the sublimity of their behavior before their judges and executioners. And this transference of values won't work—or will only work in so far as we watch its odd operation in Genêt's mind. He makes no concealment of the fact—though at the same time imposing on the images this idolatrous symbolism—that these heroes are for him passionately desired sexual objects. He is attracted by (1) their beauty, (2) their having committed murders (or treacheries—an even more seductive qualification), and (3) their having been executed. To be sure "Divine" (who is given to betraying "her" pals to the police) dies of tuberculosis, but Genêt will have [it] that (page 13) *"Divine est morte sainte et assassinée—par la phtisie."*

But these canonizations do not work—or work only in so far as they throw our eyes back on Genêt—Genêt producing a trick and knowing that he is doing so. Here again the publishing blurb is wrong and is an impertinence: *"Jamais style n'a transfiguré d'une manière plus éclatante des héros de faits-divers; mais derrière ces héros . . . il y a l'évidence de destins aussi rigoureux qu'exemplaires."* Which is nonsense.

Genêt has read a great deal of great literature (he stole the volumes, beautifully bound, while housebreaking), but he also read—and describes with deep emotion—hundreds of dime novels of bandits, pirates, knights, and cowboys. And the heroes of these works were for him the objects of an all too literal, passionate fixation. The habit was formed: he is in an intense erotic relation with the characters of his creation.

It is his literary problem—and how conscious a literary artist he is—to make us accept his glorification and justification of his passional image—his habit, his necessity, his *malédiction.* This is what the Marquis de Sade set out to do also—with a far less dazzling literary equipment; but he pursued a different course; he tried to over-topple, first, our previous—our "normal"—preconceptions in regard to a wide variety of matters. De Sade, moreover, had a less difficult task, since there is a component of "sadism" in all passion.

Genêt engages, then, in every device which may establish himself in his own eyes and in ours as a "hero of erotic revelation"—every device except pathos. Proud he is, and the measure of his lofty pride is that he does not invoke pity. The material for such an invocation is omnipresent—especially in

7 Presumably *L'Age de raison* (1945), part one of his *Les Chemins de la liberté* (1945-49).

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the second novel [*Miracle de la rose*] material for a conjoined horror and pity is omnipresent. The novels are immense constructions of special pleading, but that plea he does not enter: he is not the victim of early upbringing or neurotic deformation; not even the victim of an uncomprehending society.

A great deal of the time his plea is, as it were, presented in reverse: he insults us; he hurls obscenities at us—that is to show us that he is not bowed down with shame, he is not engaged precisely in pleading. The novels are very different; in *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* he reproduces at great length the life of these doll-like men—his people, his kind—showing them mocked by the populace, forced into a little world of their own. He is aware of (and underscores) the extra-normality of it, but marks no scorn as he marks no pathos. Yet it has horror, too, and he knows it; but horror can exist with contempt which implies superiority in the onlooker. And here his "pleading" (his attempt to establish himself as a sort of moral hero) takes its most ingenious turn. He says that he descended into degradation for reasons one must respect:

[*Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs,*] page 51: *". . . Je pourrais . . . confier que ce mépris que je supporte—en riant aux éclats, ce n'est pas encore . . . par mépris du mépris, mais pour n'être pas ridicule, pour n'être pas avili, par rien ni personne . . . . Que j'annonce que je suis une vieille pute, personne ne peut surenchère, je décourage l'insulte.". . .*

[*Miracle de la Rose,*] page 210: There are no horrors in the world (he lists some) like *". . . les quelques détails qui font du prisonnier . . . un réprouvé. Mais à l'intérieur de la prison, à son coeur même, existe le mitard et la salle de discipline d'où l'on remonte purifié."*

Genêt, like Dostoievski, could have made us believe in this final purification and saintliness achieved through the conscious exploration of the last abjection, if he had not used his material constantly toward an erotic gratification before our very eyes. You can't both be purified by Hell and enjoy Hell at the same time.

But in one important passage he claims to have emerged from Hell: [*Miracle de la Rose,*] page 206: *"Si j'écrivais un roman, j'aurais quelqu' intérêt à m'étendre sur mes gestes d'alors, mais je n'ai voulu par ce livre que montrer l'expérience menée de ma libération d'un état de pénible torpeur, de vie honteuse et basse, occupée par la prostitution, la mendicité et soumise aux prestiges, subjuguée par les charmes du monde criminel. Je me libérais par et pour une attitude plus fière."*

Perhaps I have read these books wrong; perhaps that is what he shows us; but I think not.

Post-scripta:

But—as I have said so often on the platform—the secret of a writer's life is his search for the real Right Subject. Like Lawrence of Arabia, Genêt was (and more than Lawrence) a born writer. From earliest years he must have felt the life he led and the life about him as straining toward a state of literature. The ever-deepening horrors must have presented themselves to him as writable, transfigurable into a picture of themselves. With a sensibility like his he had no choice but (1) to kill himself (he tells of such promptings), (2) to become a saint,* or (3) to try for Dante's guerdon.

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* As illustration of this relation between extreme suffering and saintliness and as last illustration of his magnificent command of language, [*Miracle de la rose,*] pages 215-216; *"Ces condamnés à mort par toute leur vie—les relégués—savent qu'il n'est pour échapper à l'horreur que l'amitié . . . . après avoir assisté à la scène aussi terriblement fabuleuse que la menace coléreuse de Dieu au couple puni, oser vivre et vivre de toutes ses forces, a la beauté tragique des grandes malédictions car c'est digne de ce que fit dans le cours de tous les âges l'Humanité mise à la porte du Ciel. Et c'est proprement la sainteté, qui est de vivre selon le Ciel, malgré Dieu."*

That almost persuades one. All Humanity has been cursed, is sinful, and is in dire distress. Wherein are these condemned young men much worse than their fellow mortals? And see—says Genêt—with what pride and energy and intermittently self-forgetting love they live out their lives though immured, victimized and reviled.

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But one must not forget the constant gratuitous "self-indulgent" obscenity throughout. In the light of that it is almost with a smile one sees that France has to accept this painful situation: a great writer who exceeds the worst scabrosity of the Roman Empire.

How ironic a visitation. What a *fléau!*

587. Columbia University Club, [New York,] Tuesday, November 6, 1951.
Emerson's Optimism (and America's).

. . . I see that Van Wyck Brooks affirms that Emerson had known difficulty, poverty, and frustration. I doubt it; even if these conditions had been about him, they would have meant something different in that Boston air and, secondly, he would have been of too shuttered a mind to have taken them for such. He did not starve; he was not beaten; he was not—like Poe—hated. The death of his first wife? I can well believe he suffered; but he may well have *reached his resignation* too soon. There was no element of protest in him. He describes how the death of his son was not able to bring him to the feeling that he was coping with reality.

He was—to use a much admired phrase—sufficient to himself. And here we are back to our American individualism. That's what American individualism is: sufficiency to oneself. That Americans are also lonely and hence *in*sufficient to themselves is only apparently a contradiction: for they are sufficient to themselves without being able to make that sufficiency into a sufficiency to the whole experience of life which includes themselves.

Europeans are not sufficient to themselves: they must draw strength from all those dependencies on the social group, the environment, on religion, but on religion as it reaches them through its repetitions, agents, rituals, and concretions. They make for themselves a better sufficiency (to live by) from all that is about them; they make little effort to be sufficient to themselves: that only their great can do . . . .

648. Hamden, [Ct.,] July 16, 1953.
Finnegans Wake.

Paid a call yesterday on Adeline (Mrs. Francis) Glasheen of . . . Farmington, with whom I have had a long *F.W.* correspondence. I had renounced that drug and had given her all my apparatus; she has entered into correspondence with two addicts in England. At her house I saw [J. S.] Atherton's paper on the Koran in *F.W.* [and his] . . . lists of songs (and *all* of [Thomas] Moore's *Irish Melodies*) embedded in *F.W.* . . .

The wonder grows. All kinds of wonder. But the chief one today is the extent to which J. J. so constantly leans on a book: he must find a place in *F.W.* for *every one* of Moore's melodies, together with the name of the old tune it is sung to; he must find a place for *every one* of the *sutras* of the Koran; he must introduce every figure in the [Lewis Carroll] *Alice* books. It is understandable that he must find a place for every constellation, every element in the physical series; every color in the spectrum (over and over again); but this passion for all-inclusiveness applied to Moore! That one should have to know in such detail Boucicault's play *Arrah-na-Pogue* and Wills's *A Royal Divorce!*

It is characteristic of our time that every serious work must attempt either a cosmology or a basic metaphysic. The presentation of a fragment of experience is no longer possible, so worm-eaten or eroded do all the scaffoldings of thought and custom appear to be.

But what is hard to see is that Joyce and Pound use such bits of flying straw or odd-shaped bricks to build their Hagia Sophia—*Arrah-na-Pogue,* and the career of a minor *condottiere.*

With Joyce, however, it represents a sort of honesty: he doesn't only use what he has read ("library-read"); he uses what he has lived with: the student at Clongowes and Belvedere went annually to Boucicault's play and was enthralled by it.

But it is a sign of impoverishment that Joyce's point of departure has been so often from the written word. Life—and his life—

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is always pressingly there, but it reaches us through that refraction. As Kafka's does not; as Proust's does not. Mann leans heavily, too, on erudition and on the parody (or imitation) of antique styles.

This is not the same thing as saying that they employ myth-figures: Ulysses, Faust, Teiresias, Semele, etc. They draw not only upon the myth but on the literary tradition of the myth—which reaches its most astonishing exemplification when Pound [in his Canto I] lovingly gives us a Latin translation [by Andreas Divus] of the *Odyssey*.

Books—writing-men—feeding on writing-men.

And of course in all this I am thinking of myself.

664. The Key Wester, [Key West, Fla.,] Tuesday, December 3, 1953. Gogol, Russian Humor, and the Consciousness of a Vast Universe.

Rereading *Dead Souls** I have been struck by a humorous device which I call the *excessively specific in non-pertinent situations*. To be sure, we are accustomed to this in the conversation of old ladies—the classic example being Miss Bates in *Emma*—the *enchainement* of details introduced through free association. In their case, however, we understand that the far-fetched details are *relevant to them*. In this novel they are embedded in an obviously intellectually controlled exposition and their presence does not denote that the author has a silly and incoherent mind; why then do we laugh?

In the style of Defoe and in Flaubert we are also given details of the highest particularization which are far from being necessary to our knowledge or even credence. These are a device of realistic writing; they are attempts to convince us that the narrative is absolutely factual: the only reason for mentioning such apparent irrelevancies is that they were so; no one would have dreamed of contriving them.† To some extent Dickens imparts vividness to his characters and places by conferring upon them certain singularities; but the singularities are so harped upon and developed that the intention becomes obvious; the singularity takes the center of the stage; the irrelevance by force of insistence becomes an operative factor—that is to say, a relevance.

Gogol's "irruptions of the impertinent" have another character which renders them irresistibly droll and which lends them a philosophical character. Aesthetically, they convey a sense of the innumerability of persons and objects in the world, but they reach us in the category of irony: "Millions of people and things in the world are now in existence; isn't it laughable that I isolate *this one,* for truly a man would be driven to despair if he attempted to catalogue the most tiny fraction of them all."

But the strangest part of this in Gogol is that one is continually reminded of Homer. Homer's formal similes are constantly doing the same thing: the simile exceeds its formal function of indicating a resemblance between two appearances; it burgeons into specific details which are not relevant to the comparison and which occasionally run counter to it. "As when a woodsman fells a tree on a rocky height" (this is me improvising) "and the crown of leaves falls with a mighty crash upon the ground, and the woodsman rejoices *knowing that his dear wife and children will have fuel for the winter months and bright flames will leap on his hearthstone*—so fell mighty Theognis." Outer circles of life are forever pressing upon the narrative for admission. In Homer the effect is not ironic because the details that have been drawn into the image are not highly specific; given

* Modern Library, 1936. Translation by Constance Garnett, which one divines to be deficient in agility and surprise. Must get Nabokov's book [*Nikolai Gogol* (1944)] and compare his rendering of certain passages. *Query:* Did Gogol (1809-52) read Dickens?

† As all liars know. So the tall tales of Davy Crockett, etc., go in for the most grave-faced minute specification in order to support the credibility of a whopper.

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one more degree of singularized specificity they would strike us as incongruous ("incongruous" because we say to ourselves: "If you're going to pause to recall such freely-associated details as that, you will never end, for there are millions and millions of them open to your reach at that degree of relevance") . . . .

The very first paragraph of the novel gives us a character who never appears again:

> . . . Moreover, just as the chaise drove up to the hotel it was met by a young man in extremely short and narrow white canvas trousers, in a coat with fashionable cut-away tails and a shirt-front fastened with a Tula breast-pin adorned with a bronze pistol. The young man turned round, stared at the chaise, holding his cap which was almost flying off in the wind, and went on his way.

Are we to be given everyone who looked at Tchitchikov? The breast-pin of everyone who looked at Tchitchikov? We smile at Gogol's impudence; but we get the point. Gogol's hero is very nearly an Every-russian (and so joins that company of [Joyce's] Bloom, Earwicker, and Kafka's K.—the hero of the novel of the future); and the more a central figure represents a universal, the more the author must construct an ambiance which furnishes indications and intimations of everything, everywhere, everybody and everyhow.

Hotel Ambos Mundos, Havana, [*Cuba,*] *December 17, 1953.*

Lately I have been reading *The Brothers Karamazov.* So far, in six hundred pages, I have not found one "gratuitous" detail (though there is one society lady who babbles with them). (*Query:* Do I not remember seeing somewhere that André Gide, writing about Madame de Sévigné, picks some bold adjectives—that is, adjectives that serve as metaphors but from which the conjunctions implying metaphor have been omitted—and says of them that they show the "Dostoievski touch"?)

I say that this kind of irrelevance gives the effect of drollness. It says that out of the billions of things that are present in the world surrounding my selected story-subject, I introduce, *without reason,* this *one.* And with that "one" the door is for a moment opened to all the others. It is droll because it is incongruous, disproportionate, and unmanageable. Hence, it could barely find a place in a tragic presentation of life. The tragic emotion, although it is subtended by a sense of tragedy in all living, can and must express itself in a specific instance of catastrophic event for one person or group of persons. These sufferers must be for a time isolated from all the other sufferers in the world and in the world's history. The sympathetic emotion we feel for one mother who has lost her son is not the same emotion that we feel in contemplating all the mothers who have lost their sons.

677. Hamden, [Ct.,] March 13, 1954.
François Mauriac: *Ce qui était Perdu; Les Anges Noirs (Oeuvres Complètes,* Volume III —with *Le Noeud de Vipères*—Bibliothèque Bernard Grasset, Chez Arthème Fayard, Paris. Date at the back: 1950. *Ce qui était Perdu* appeared 1930; *Les Anges Noirs,* 1936; *Le Noeud de Vipères,* 1932).

It's easy enough to express one's indignation at these novels (and at the later ones of Graham Greene): the *délectation* in concupiscence that lies so hypocritically close beneath the surface of the reprehension; the artificiality with which F.M. constructs the traps of sin into which he hounds his poor characters; the abuse of coincidence in his *finales*; the sentimentality, the sugared holy water which bedews his prose when he has occasion to draw near the altar or the rosary or the company of his priests (of whom we are so often told that they were *chastes*).

What struck me this time was something else:

The subject of these works is sin. It certainly is. And what sins particularly agitate the writer? *Ce qui était Perdu:* drugs, . . .

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homosexuality (implied, . . .), suicide, incest and adultery . . . . *Les Anges Noirs*: murder, seduction, blackmail—everything implied . . . ; adultery . . . ; and subtending them all what Mauriac himself calls *matérialisme,* by which he means the passion for acquiring money—which plays the whole role in *Le Noeud de Vipères*—and the neglect of "God."

Let us concede sin, without attempting to define it, and concede a wide range of it. The geographical, cultural distribution of sins has yet to be made: from Leviticus to the Code Napoléon; and from the New Testament to the novels of Mauriac.

We find ourselves at once in the problem of "essence": the assumption that there is an essential crime as against the crime-in-situation. Crimes are posited as "essential" in two categories: the social convention, or law; and the religious convention, or the higher morality. And both find themselves at once in contradiction, each with the other.

Murder is a sin, yet soldiers are encouraged to murder. Murder is justifiable in self-defense. So there is a whole gamut from justifiable to reprehensible murder; from admired murder to regrettable but necessary murder to perhaps unjustifiable murder, to reprehensible murder to heinous murder. Religion allows of the gradations, also. Yet the kind of mind that is formed by living in "environment" (and the end of this series of reflections is to relate Mauriac and Greene to the European dense-population feudal-inheritance thinking) tends always to erect essences: to inject finality and authority into a concept, and thereby to inhibit the mind from examining the particular occasion of murder—and murder is nothing but a succession of particular occasions. This process of erecting essential categories is related to the millenary formation of the Western mind, the ascription of final authorities to kings and priests and conceding magical, unexaminable qualifications of rightness to them: the mind, too, is governed by Principalities and Powers.

These novels teem with illustrations of the contradiction into which the adherent of such essential thinking is driven. First, the yawning gap between the good and the bad: everybody is deep in sin except the priest or the saint . . . .

The Mauriacs ensconce themselves in a set of received ideas: the Seven Deadly Sins. *There* they are authoritative—dogmatic ethics are their throne,—from there they project their cadres of human behavior.

Now note: The twentieth century flows like a river—it advances the assumption that each occasion of behavior is unique.* The word *murder* does mean to put an end to the life of a human being; it is a word of description and is inevitably surrounded by associations of rightful horror and reprehension; but each of the millions of murders which take place annually must be thought of as taking place under the sign of and participating in the nature of an ethico-religious essential category "murder." This distinction is not based upon any effort to palliate or even to "understand" the motives of each separate murder; it is part of an effort which should continually be in process to refine the language, to introduce gradually the same distinction as regards an enormous amount of such usages.

Note: Well, well. I see that I have not yet been able to make clear to myself what I feel but cannot express. All the above has been an effort to *surprise* out of myself a further step of definition in this feeling.

Hotel Algonquin, New York, March 15, 1954.

When I began this aborted train of thought, I wanted also to trace out another. To show that Graham Greene and Mauriac and the later Julien Green, writing from a dogmatic point of view, inclined so easily toward the criminal novel. (Mauriac boasts in his fatuous preface to Volume Three that he could have rivalled [Georges] Simenon—

* I remember my astonishment at hearing Jacques Maritain declare—in his lectures at Princeton a few years ago, that "no two murders are alike." The dilettante *existentialiste* who will not permit himself to draw the consequences.

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a passage I shall transcribe for Georges, if he does not already know it; and Greene was himself a writer of crime stories before he was struck down by *la grâce.*) Isn't it precisely because one cannot make one's points in our time on sin-viewed-as-essence save by stating it in its most extreme and horrendous aspects?

God is a king. As he is a king he is also a judge. Judges of necessity work in essences: justice and crime. Mercy is an irregularity, a violence operated on justice. This is clearly expressed by the observation in popular Catholic life: one pleads with the Virgin to sway her Son, who will then use His influence to deflect His Father. The greater part of prayer has always been the effort to make Absolute Wisdom *change its mind*—the most revelatory illustration of the anthropomorphic character of Western religion.

681. Gideon Putnam Hotel, Saratoga Springs, [N.Y.,] Monday, March 22, 1954. Madame de Sévigné.

. . . Each person to a different degree has a need and an appetite for exercising the faculty of wonder. Mystery and the marvellous surround us; but the consciousness of their presence haunts some people more than others. The forms of the Catholic religion feed this need richly; but Madame de Sévigné could not deeply imbibe them there. She was a humanist. She was possessed by a powerful and mysterious passion; that was an object of wonder. She was naturally absorbed in the painting of high passions and that she could not find to the degree necessary for her in *La Princesse de Clèves* nor in the *poésie galante* of her time. Strangely enough she could not, or would not, see it in the society about her,—though if she had lived to read the *Mémoires de Saint-Simon,* she would have been caught up into astonishment at the pitch to which he ascribes the passional life of her neighbors. So with what self-forgetting delight she assimilates it in Tasso, in Ariosto (a little cooler), in the History of the Crusades, Tacitus, Josephus,—and in these grandiloquent novels. Moreover, she had lived through the Fronde and among the friends dearest to her was a *grande âme* who conducted himself epically then—the Cardinal de Retz. Early in life her imagination had been opened to the heroical grand style . . . . It is this *échapée* into the sublime (explaining also her preference for Corneille over Racine) which permits her (I am remembering Gertrude Stein's remark about Horace Walpole) to describe trifles without descending to the trivial . . . .

In the presence of great works of art our admiration or disparagement must find reasons for its existence. And most of these reasons are beside the point. We praise and blame for the wrong reasons, with the wrong reasons—from the woman who disliked Rubens because he painted the fat behinds of so many fat women; [to] Glenway Wescott, who didn't like Beethoven because of all those "abrupt louds and softs"; to professors who admire Shakespeare because his psychology is so "true." A painting is primarily a demonstration of the effects obtainable from affixing paint to a surface; its relation to the world outside the canvas is secondary. So the letters of Madame de Sévigné are a triumph of medium, —and her self-portraiture, her adjustment of the content to the recipient, the thoughts and events she communicates are secondary. This isolation for our discussion of the medium is something different from the old distinction between form and content; it is a third element to which even form is subservient. Mme de Sévigné's medium is the voice speaking—the voice speaking as distinguished from the mind functioning. She had an exquisite faculty for marshalling words into the numerous modes of which they are capable in converse, but music has laws of its own far more subject to form and mistakenly introducing into the discussion of this medium certain associations of auditory harmony, sweetness, or force. Auditory her relation to medium was, but auditory in a more fundamental sense than is expressed by the word *musical*; it is auditory in the sense that one would recall the sounds

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of wind in a forest of pines or that of surf or [of] a train heard in the distance. Madame de Sévigné's medium is an alembication of the sounds of thousands of voices talking. Even before we attend to what she is saying, we hear this *tone*. Her means are long words and short ones, long phrases and short ones, interjections, accents, inversions, cadences. Just as the iambic pulsed in Milton's mind before the words of a verse presented themselves; just as the spectrum pressed upon Titian's imagination before he dipped his brush,—so the resources of rhythm and syntax lay like a clavier before her, but *her* clavier. The usages of a singularly accomplished society had long prepared a wide range of effects, but all of them and more she had made most singularly her own.

It is by mastery of this medium, then, that she is the transcendant letter-writer, and we are not saying sufficient when we praise her for her wit or narrative skill or vivid observation. It is insufficiently remarked that those qualities themselves "ride" on the cadence of phrasing and on the happy adjustment of syntax. One could select a paragraph of a letter and substitute nonsense words for the words most significant for the sentence's meaning and still be aware of her skill as a writer; but one could not delete words from it, not (not most of all) those many words which seem at first glance to be no major elements in the success—the innumerable *"ma bonne,"* the omnipresent qualifier *"fort,"* the attack on a sentence with *"Voilà ce que c'est que . . . ."*

683. Janet [Dakin]'s House, Amherst, [Mass.,] March 27, 1954.
Robert Frost's Birthday.

The dinner last night. R.F. had received the honors of a similar dinner the night before at the Waldorf-Astoria; told me he hadn't slept all night; told the guests that he didn't read much about himself, but that when he did read about himself, praise or blame, he couldn't sleep. "Lines that cost the critic three minutes to write, cost me a whole night's sleep. I ask myself if I write like that" (*i.e.,* is he as great or as negligible as they say?). I seem always to have missed taking into account this extreme vulnerability to comment of poets and writers: Virginia Woolf's diary; Gertrude Stein, asked by Virgil Thomson what a writer wants most, is reported to have flung up her great hands and cried, laughing: "Oh, praise, praise, praise!" Should I take this into account in all writers? Is there something about the word that separates *its* writing artist from the painter and composer? R.F. was undoubtedly thinking of fame in the afterworld. He ended up by saying he hoped he had left "a few poems that you couldn't get away from." They were pebbles—hard, worn down. The quizzical sententious Diogenes-monologue was better than usual last night, in spite of his fatigue. He likes the role, and here were eighty persons, selected by him; some had come a distance, one from California, the [Gordon K.] Chalmerses from Ohio, etc.

Too big for friendship, too small for apotheosis: the evening really wasn't right; none of the speeches were right (mine, deplorable—the same old over-emphatic incoherence—but it bores me to rehearse the reasons again). What saved the evening was—we hoped—that he liked it. But the fact that he liked it was not an expression of the greater part of him, but of that part—the Lion-visitor at campuses—that was his way of earning a living.

It's my business to think through the ways in which I can see him and his work as representative of the American traits. But I'm all too near, and, besides, at this moment I'm still tasting the quinine of my discomfort at my more than inadequate contribution.

I once said to Bob Hutchins after a sermon he gave in the Chicago chapel: "You did fine, Bob." He replied: "Don't hurry me. I shall think so tomorrow." I don't wish to find that issue; nor the issue of self-justification in grievance against the factors stacked against me. The thing to do is to turn my back on it and think of other things. I used to think that all we did well came

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from our effort to compensate for what we had done badly. I no longer believe that: though it may apply to life and relationships, it's too earth-bound to apply to art.

Is there any country in which such an eighty-years-festival-homage would have been achieved correctly? It is an occasion for formalism, the forms concealing the pressure of all that cannot be spoken. Forms and humor. Shaw would have made a great noise; Freud was absent from his; Bergson's would have been borne forward on academic pomp.

Frost read us a poem he had written recently.[8] From his farm's door many a night he had reinforced himself by looking at Sirius. One night a dog, errant or rejected by a home, slips by his knees and lies down by his fire. He brings it food and drink. Beautifully exact descriptions of the dog's behavior throughout. In the morning, it slips away. Was it a return visit from Sirius? I couldn't get the whole import of the poem, but it looked to me as though it directly contradicted what I had been saying about his view of nature "and the stars" in my poor little bungled speech a quarter of an hour before. "All is symbol in poetry," he said. Yes, but a symbol is a lariat; formerly it has been sufficient that the lariat enwrap and bring to its knees a passing fancy, a fragment of a fragment of experience. There is something about the pressure on our minds today that demands that a symbol be a mode of stating the All—only so can it be a growing kinetic action of the mind. All symbols less than that are static metaphors: "Look here, upon this picture, and on this, . . ."* It is these facile quasi-symbols that permit poets to flirt prettily with big ideas, and then draw back leaving them unexplored, unwrestled-with—giving at one and the same time an air of philosophical thinking and of discretion, modesty, and of knowing more than is told. Frost and Housman and Hardy are full of this. The later Yeats is not . . . .

8 "One More Brevity," published in *In the Clearing* (1962).

708. SS "Cristoforo Colombo," Westbound, April 3, 1955.

. . . A Little Weakness of André Gide.

I've always said that the French go into great excitement, and complacent excitement, about the sins of the flesh in order to conceal the fact that they are subject to a far more deforming obsession—avarice. (All those novels in which Mauriac hounds his poor characters through the alternations of *péché* and *la grâce,* for his own savage enjoyment—an enjoyment so evident that one is unable to hear any true heartbeat in his mannequins. And then he writes a novel about avarice—*Le Noeud de Vipères*—and becomes authentic and convincing.)

A certain young American, [X], broke his leg and came to Aix to convalesce. I had met him at tea at Alice [Toklas]'s and [he] sent me a note. [X] is a sort of less vivacious Boswell, diligently and unsuppressibly cultivating Picasso and Gide and Cocteau and Marie-Laure de Noailles, and anybody who is anybody in Paris. Alice was deeply displeased that Dora Maar had brought him, uninvited, to tea; she remembered that Gertrude [Stein] had once been cultivated by [X] and had brusquely almost brutally slapped him down. I am grateful to him for . . . the following anecdote . . . .

Gide was always well off; [X] even said he was rich. One day he invited [X] and a friend to lunch in a famous restaurant. After lunch they continued talking a long while. The waiter brought the bill and laid it by Gide. They continued to talk. Finally Gide

* In writing this I went to the shelf to verify the phrasing in *Hamlet.* To myself I said: "Where will I find the Closet Scene?" But the book had opened at the very page. So while Frost was reading from his poems to us the other night, having difficulties with eyesight and with the index, he suddenly said: "Here the book has opened at the very page I was looking for---- That's never happened before. One might think there was a special significance in that; but best not----" then mumbled some words. He *skirted* a mystique, then rejected it; but he should not have even skirted it.

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said to [X]: "I know that I asked you to lunch, but can I ask you to pay the bill? I----I----*c'est plus fort que moi.*" Those thousands of pages of self-examination in the *Journal*—all that clamorous confession—and not a word about this sorry, inglorious vice: the inability to let some money pass out of his hands. All Gide is hollow. How the French could have been taken in by that marmoreal style, which on closer examination is lathe-and-plaster. The graduate student who wished to be taken for a faun.

Forthcoming in *The New Criterion:*

Is it all right to read Somerset Maugham?
by Joseph Epstein
A portrait of Degas *by Eugenia Janis*
Robert Fitzgerald at Princeton *by Sonya Rudikoff*
Atget *by Dan Hofstadter*
The new feminist literary criticism
by Carol Iannone
Dartmouth's Hood Museum *by Roger Kimball*
Hofmannsthal & Broch *by René Wellek*
L'Amour fou: photography & surrealism *by Jed Perl*
Remembering "Parsifal" *by Samuel Lipman*
New poems *by Herbert Morris and Donald Petersen*

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Spanish still-life painting of the "Golden Age"

by James Gardner

Even during the sixteenth century, when the Holy Roman Emperor resided in Spain and made that country the greatest power of the earth, Spain could never aspire to cultural hegemony over the rival states of Europe. Long after the Renaissance had won its most resolute victories abroad, she clung tenaciously to the late Gothic spirit in art, and by the time she was at last able to embrace the new learning that poured in from the north and the east, the specters of Luther and Erasmus had made humanism distasteful to her ruling classes. Thus, while Spain would come to adopt many of the formal conventions and technical innovations of the new art, never did she do so with the creative abandon that had characterized the cultural life of the rest of Europe.

It is only with the seventeenth century, known as the Siglo de Oro, or the Golden Century, that our average art lover begins to recognize the names of a few of Spain's artists and poets. But even here, these do not crowd upon the recollection in anything like the same profusion as the artists of France or Italy or Holland, and even in an age in which neglected things take on a certain interest because they have been neglected—in which scholars are ever seeking newer regions in which to exercise their erudition—the art and poetry of Spain remain by comparison something of an undiscovered country.

It is for reasons such as these that the prospect of seeing some forty-four Spanish still lifes, even from the Golden Age (1600-1650), is unlikely to have sent many art lovers to the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth this summer, or even to the Toledo Museum of Art, where the show moved in the fall. This is a shame, of course, because the beauties of the show, even if they will ultimately fall a little below their Dutch or Italian counterparts, are nevertheless abundant and striking, and a major asset of the exhibition is the opportunity to study the five surviving still lifes of Juan Sánchez Cotán, for the first time brought together in the same room.[1]

The aesthetic and intellectual satisfaction that this latter prospect affords, though perhaps not immediately obvious or irresistible to all of us, is nevertheless not to be underestimated. By having all of these paintings together in one room, rather than demanding more from one's memory than it is likely to deliver, or running back and forth between continents, one is allowed a rare opportunity to confirm or to contest a thousand suspicions and intuitions that otherwise would have remained nothing more

1 "Spanish Still Life in the Golden Age: 1600-1650" was on view at the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas, from May 11 to August 4. It can be seen at the Toledo Museum of Art in Toledo, Ohio, from September 8 to November 3. The exhibition was organized by William B. Jordan, Deputy Director of the Kimbell Art Museum, with the assistance of Sarah Schroth, a curatorial fellow at the museum.

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than that. One is also given the chance to match one detail exhaustively against another, until the minutest gradations of paint take on a sculptural quality and the individual identities of the various works begin to assume rich and unexpected patterns of correspondence.

With the exception of Diego Velázquez, who was represented with two beautiful works from his earliest period, Cotán is likely to be the only artist in the present exhibition who is known to someone not in the profession, and then only if that viewer had a greater than average interest in the Baroque. With admirable forbearance the curator of the exhibition, William B. Jordan, has resisted the obvious temptation, which two years ago proved too much for the curators of the Prado, to place one of Cotán's still lifes on the cover of the exhibition's catalogue.[2] The reason that the temptation would have been so great, and also the reason for which Cotán just might happen to be known to some viewers, is that he has the reputation for being a modern painter, a dangerous misrepresentation propagated by people who either refuse to accept the Old Masters on their own terms or else lose interest very quickly unless they can find something of themselves mirrored in everything they look upon.

The foundation of the rumor that Cotán was one of us resides in two of his still lifes, titled in the exhibition *Quince, Cabbage, Melon and Cucumber* and *Cardoon and Parsnips.* What seems so impressive to modern tastes in the works in question is the overwhelming sense they provide of that understatement that occurs so frequently in the poetry and prose of our century, and also of the emptiness, the blackness, and the negation unto silence that have constituted one of the defining modalities of the modern spirit. In their minimalism, they are easy to describe: in both of these works, the fruits and vegetables named in the titles are arrayed in gentle parabolas from top right to bottom left and vice versa. The brilliance of their illumination is made only the more striking by the background they interrupt, which is of as deep and unqualified a blackness as the entrance to a mine shaft stretching for miles into the core of the earth. The artistry in this is highly original and powerful, and while it is not necessary for us to make any forays into the subconscious of the artist, nevertheless Cotán must surely have been aware of the profound psychological impact it would have on his viewers. Four hundred years later, this impact remains undiminished.

But anyone who is tempted to read into this painting portents of our own spiritual preoccupations, either of Heideggerian *Dasein* or of the Death of God, may profit from a careful examination of the *Still Life with Game Fowl,* which reveals itself in due course to be nothing other than an almost exact reproduction of *Quince, Cabbage, Melon and Cucumber.* The voids, however, have been conscientiously filled in with dangling fowl in the upper regions, and a squash has been plugged into the space remaining at the base of the canvas, underneath the cabbage that hangs from a string. This poses an important question that is central to our appreciation of an Old Master painting. Which is the better work of art, the one with the voids, which is without question powerful and inventive, or the other painting, in which the details are more plentiful and diverse, since we are dealing not only with fruits and vegetables but also with brightly colored birds? To the twentieth-century mind, the sparser painting would instinctively seem the better, unless of course the composition and overall effect of the more filled-out canvas should possess a different but commensurable attraction (which, however, I don't think anyone would wish to argue). But to the artist himself, and to his patrons—although the one might seek, and the other delight in, the drama of the first painting—the second painting would have probably been more appealing, since it provides more opportunity for the artist to display his skill

2 *Spanish Still Life in the Golden Age: 1600-1650,* by William B. Jordan, was published by the Kimbell Art Museum: 252 pages, $45.

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in rendering objects (which is surely an important part of still-life painting).

The question is further complicated by two factors: first, the additions are beautifully painted in the second work; and second, the passages that merely reproduce, almost stroke for stroke, the objects found in the first are better painted in the second. Though the catalogue illustrations could never possibly reveal this, and though it may not be detectable if one is standing more than three inches from the canvas or less than two, a close examination will reveal that the apple in the upper left corner of the sparser painting is rather lifeless compared with its equivalent in the more filled-out one, whose details, though virtually identical from the point of view of a botanical textbook, nevertheless seem to move and breathe with a kind of suppressed vitality. Poised atop the composition like a sun or moon, this apple appears to generate gravitational force through some indwelling dynamism. Similarly, the cabbage that dangles just below it is more appetizing, the pits of the melon that follows have a richer, more oily texture that rings truer than the melon in the first composition, and finally there is more drive and thrust to the lines that make up the cucumber, whose greens are moister and somehow more fragrant. The question that was originally posed now becomes not only whether the drama of the spare composition compensates the greater virtuosity of the other work, but also whether it compensates for a certain listlessness in its own details.

The point of this exercise has been to remind the reader of something which the artists of our own century have forgotten, if indeed they have not abolished it outright, namely, the beautiful and blessed detail. Though it is unquestionably true that these earlier artists and their patrons acknowledged the primacy of the detail, a discernment in the matter of detail is essential not only to the historical but also to the aesthetic appreciation of every painting in this exhibition. If we were dealing with modern still-life painters like William Bailey or Audrey Flack, it could at least be said that detail is not the principal objective. But it is everything that these Spanish still lifes are about, and either one learns to love details and to distinguish the better from the worse, or one is apt to like these paintings not enough or for the wrong reasons.

Cotán has the distinction, which is not that common in classical still-life artists, of being able to claim as much credit for the "invention" of that curious vegetable known as the cardoon as Willem Kalf could claim for the "invention" of the lemon peel, or Caravaggio for a specific weave of basket. Thus, even when subsequent generations made use of these things, there was always some level at which the spirit of their originators shone through. And the variations that the cardoon underwent in the two generations after Cotán provide an interesting index of the degree and nature of his influence.

To all appearances, since I have never tasted one, or seen one in real life, the cardoon would seem to be something like a white celery plant, whose wide and unyielding stalks culminate in spikey and rather unappetizing tips. And yet the cardoon was an inspired choice on the part of Cotán, who used it in three of his five surviving still-life compositions, where it at once took over any context in which it was placed. Cotán's definitive statement in the matter of the cardoon was made in the painting entitled in the present exhibition *Cardoon and Parsnips*. This is surely the austerest work in the entire show, and a less pugnacious vegetable than the cardoon wouldn't have stood a chance against the enveloping void of utter blackness. It answers that void through the insistent assertion of one stalk after another, with minutely serried pinkish white striations that shoot upwards from the ledge upon which they lie. At the same time, a little to the left, four parsnips, which are perhaps the finest things to survive from Cotán, are released like springs coiling backwards into the dark.

Over a generation after Cotán entered a Carthusian monastery in 1603, and, as far as

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we know, abandoned still-life painting to devote himself to those unappealing religious works by which his reputation has been in no way enhanced, the painter Felipe Ramírez, in a canvas that was not in the present show, could lift his own cardoon bodily from Cotán's *Game Fowl, Fruit and Cardoon,* reproducing with what appears to be complete accuracy each fiber of its coarse and rugged surface. The striking thing about this comparison is that the selfsame object produces two entirely different effects by virtue of those objects to which it is juxtaposed. The cardoon in question is one of Cotán's tamer interpretations, but through the proximity of the dead birds and the eerily elongated parsnips, it tends to alienate the viewer, while the example by Ramírez not only seems less brutal and uninviting but looks almost edible. Of the other artists who follow Cotán, Alejandro de Loarte has created the tamest and most civilized cardoon of all, carefully weeding out all the spikiness native to the vegetable so that it possesses none of the horrific realism that it has in Cotán. Juan van der Hamen, in a painting that was not included in the show, has rendered each detail of his cardoon with scarcely less attention than his forbear has done, but the jauntiness of the accompanying shapes constitutes what by Cotán's standards would have been a distraction from the profounder drama of the piece. Juan de Zurbarán (son of the more famous Francisco), instead of severing the cardoon from the blackness behind it, as Cotán had done, sends his cardoon boomeranging by precipitate degrees into that void. Finally, Cristóbal Ramírez de Arellano breaks away most radically from the influence of Cotán by infusing his cardoon with that genteel sensibility which begins to appear in Spanish art in the middle years of the seventeenth century.

If the influence of Cotán can be found in rather a few Spanish still-life painters working toward the beginning of the seventeenth century, the presence of Caravaggio is also very much felt. And yet the nature of Caravaggio's influence requires explanation. At first glance it might seem plausible that Cotán's dramatic chiaroscuro technique would have much in common with the revolution that Caravaggio was effecting simultaneously in Rome. But Cotán had already formulated his typical still-life style by 1602 —perhaps even before—at which time Caravaggio had only just completed the two paintings, the *Conversion of St. Paul* and the *Crucifixion of St. Peter,* in which his chiaroscuro was most dramatically promulgated. And this was a full four years before his removal to Naples would initiate his Spanish influence. But more important than this is the fact that by the time Caravaggio had reached the point in his career when he could paint these two works, he had already abandoned still-life painting. Thus Caravaggio's still lifes belong to that period of his career in which objects were still very brightly illuminated against a pale dull background. And it was these earlier works that impressed themselves upon subsequent Spanish still-life painters, so that when artists like Juan de Zurbarán set out to apply Caravaggio's chiaroscuro technique to still-life painting the result was completely different from what Caravaggio himself had done.

The two classics of still-life painting by Caravaggio are the famous picture in the Ambrosiana in Milan which represents a basket of fruits set upon a table, and a detail from the *Supper at Emmaus* in the National Gallery, London. Both of these works probably date from the last five years of the sixteenth century, and it is quite possible that their unprecedented realism might have its roots in a painting by Ambrogio Figino, a Milanese painter from whom Caravaggio would later borrow when he painted the *Madonna of the Palafrenieri.* Already in this painting, which has been dated 1595, we see those full-bodied fruits, with their finely curling leaves, that would so impress later Spanish still-life painters.

Antonio Ponce, the Spanish artist of the first half of the seventeenth century who comes closest to the spirit of Caravaggio's still lifes, was represented with two paintings in the Fort Worth exhibition. The *Still*

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Life with Grapes and Pomegranates looks like the sort of painting that Cotán might have done if he had truly been inspired by Caravaggio's fruit baskets, or conversely, like the sort of work that the early Caravaggio might have done if he had been working within the Cotánesque formula. For in this painting we see fruits set within one of those window ledges that Cotán included in every one of his extant still-life paintings, though the background reveals the matte beiges and soft grayish greens of the early Caravaggio, such as we see in his Uffizi *Bacchus*. The Ponce painting dates from 1651, and thus was created well over half a century after Caravaggio's comparable works, yet it fully breathes their spirit. And it is interesting to consider that although the international Caravaggist movement was comparatively short-lived with regard to figure painting, dying out only a few years after the master's death in 1610, the influence of his early still lifes on Spanish artists would last well into mid-century. These artists would be unique in keeping alive a part of Caravaggio's oeuvre that even his most avid Italian admirers seemed rarely to have known about. In the painting by Ponce, we find decked out on a tablecloth that actually recalls Dutch contemporaries a pomegranate like that of the *Supper at Emmaus*, with the same fleshy ripeness to it, while the velutinous leaves twist and catch the light and recede in darkness like so many variations and elaborations on the humble theme that Caravaggio had introduced into the still life in the Ambrosiana. The laden clustering of grapes has a weightiness and conviction to it that do not come easy, and their rendering might almost serve as a touchstone for a certain kind of skill in the art of still-life painting.

To superficial perception, directed either at a work of art or a work of nature, grapes tend to be reduced to a rather insipid homogeneity, comprising so many atomies, each the same size, color, and shape. But Great Nature never works this way, and anyone who concentrates his attention on a bunch of grapes for sixty seconds will be duly impressed by the force with which each one asserts its unique identity. This has nothing to do with the various marks and bruises that the grapes may have sustained through time, for such is apparent even to the most sluggish perception. Rather, the individuation to which I refer is apt to consist in little more than those tiniest gradations by which one grape will loom a little larger or a little rounder than its neighbor. In theory, perhaps, all grapes on a bunch should be the same size. But the force of nature seems to consist pre-eminently in the emergence of differentia from what had seemed pure uniformity, and the perceptive still-life painter will always hope to be alive to those minute but telling variations.

Examples of such effective and ineffective insight into nature will be found in the two still lifes by Ponce's contemporary, Juan Bautista de Espinosa, though it should be pointed out that even if one of them is here being held up to criticism, both are by any standards fine works of art. The less accomplished one, which includes a fleshy pink sea shell and a bird hovering lightly over a few pale flowers, features three bunches of grapes that look entirely un-Spanish, and that recall contemporary artists working in the Netherlands. These grapes, which are arrayed across a vertical composition that is in itself rather un-Spanish, do not have the lush and musty dullness of those grapes that figure in the works of Caravaggio and his other followers, but rather gleam like large beads of brightly burnished onyx and beryl set afire by some stray shaft of sunlight piercing them from behind. But these grapes, for all their moist and glistening lusciousness, are more or less of a piece, and nothing in their individual clusters detains the eye from duly integrating them into the rest of the composition, which is itself rather pedestrian. By contrast, in the second painting by Espinosa, the shells, the earthenware, and the lithe bird have vanished, while the plums, apples, and several varieties of grapes are left alone to compose a more coherent whole. The delighted viewer does not know at first where to direct the surfeited eye, since so many things call out all

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at once for his admiration. The bright red and gold apples have that emberous and indeterminate richness that characterizes the best still lifes of Cézanne, while the granular modulations of lavenders, yellows, and greens in the plums actually convince us that we are seeing beyond the skin, deep into the heart of the tawny meat. Then there are the three grape clusters of black, scarlet, and canary yellow, of all different shapes and sizes, illustrating beautifully the wayward individuality of each of the single grapes. But despite its bright coloristic contrast and variety, this painting reveals its affinities with Caravaggio in the thoroughness with which Espinosa has mastered the lessons in the grapes of the *Emmaus* painting, as well as in the way he has painted the gorgeous apples, which savor strongly of those peaches by Ambrogio Figino that may have inspired the Roman master.

One painter who managed to combine successfully the chiaroscuro techniques of Caravaggio's later style with the manner of his early still lifes, and who resembles in certain respects some of Caravaggio's early followers, such as the Pensionante del Saraceni, is Juan van der Hamen. If it was Cotán's innovation to set the objects of his scrutiny in a window frame giving on blackness, Van der Hamen perches them on a series of gray boxes, which have an almost surrealist facticity to them, since they have no ostensible reason for being where they are, yet they remain so palpably present. The shifting planes of these boxes recede and advance in space, rising and falling across the horizon of the canvas, and serving as a dynamic force in the generation of that all-important balance between the composition's diverse and often unruly components. The ledges created by these tiers allow Van der Hamen to reproduce that illusionist device—which occurs twice in the works of Caravaggio—by which a basket protrudes beyond its ledge toward the viewer in such a way as to appear ready to fall. Though Van der Hamen sometimes uses the sort of basket that appears in Caravaggio, in which diagonal weavings roll like minute currents of water around the circuit of the basket in a motion mimicking the gentle swellings of the basket's rim, he also makes use occasionally of a drum-like basket with a much deeper base, in which the horizontal weavings form fine needle-like striations that add a note of stasis within motion. In the consideration of these still lifes, the basket will become one of the many touchstones by which the discerning viewer distinguishes a true artist from an uninspired copyist.

The fact that the catalogue's cover illustration is a detail of a still life by Van der Hamen rather than the *Cardoon and Parsnips* by the glamorous Cotán indicates, as I have said, a laudable effort on the part of the curators to emphasize the purer beauties of painting. For although Van der Hamen is a fine painter, he is not really a glamorous one, and his virtues do not consist so much in the engaging inventiveness of his compositions as in the fineness that he imparts to each object he treats. But although it is salutary in the present circumstances to stress the details that more often than not will go ignored, and upon which these painters lavished their most devoted artistry, it would be wrong not to give sufficient praise to Van der Hamen's compositional skill, which wins us over not so much through drama as through elegant and imperturbable poise.

In the beautiful composition on the cover, called *Still Life with Sweets and Pottery,* we see objects of great textural variety set out upon three tiers. Though the background has a darkness as rich as that which we found in the paintings of Cotán, the objects in the foreground are not so starkly illuminated, and they recede by far gentler degrees into the shadow. In the basket on the highest tier Van der Hamen has set those sugary sweetmeats and dainties that the Spanish continue to delight in to this day, and which you will still find in all their golden goodness in the more provincial regions of the country. One of these, I believe, consists in a cake thoroughly soaked in honey, which, when the light catches it, brings forth a dark and glowing brown color. When this is set against the deep black background, the effect is not en-

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tirely dissimilar to that of a Rothko painting, in which it so often happens that the contiguity of two chromatically similar passages impels us to an enhanced appreciation of both colors. In addition to these, Van der Hamen has included what William Jordan assures us in the catalogue are marzipan boxes, which were one of the things that Spanish still-life painters most delighted in reproducing, since considerable agility is required in persuasively rendering the exquisitely spare shavings of wood that have gone into their making.

But the most Caravaggist of all of Van der Hamen's works, and the one in this exhibition that came closest to the work of one of Caravaggio's followers (by combining two distinct periods of the Roman master's career, the still lifes of the early phase and the chiaroscuro of the middle years) is the one here entitled *Still Life with Fruit and Glassware.* The thick bursting rind of the pomegranate is endowed with a surprising fluidity that one might not immediately expect from a Caravaggist still life. In addition to this there are two intricate glass vases that have been suggested with great subtlety and economy, while the bunch of grapes that lies between them is surely the finest example of that fruit to be found in this exhibition, and is fully comparable with the unsurpassed grapes that Caravaggio included in the *Supper at Emmaus.*

In the category of Caravaggism, one final painter deserving mention is Juan de Zurbarán, who is included under this category not because his still lifes resemble those of the master or his followers, but because he has applied to them that fulgurant chiaroscuro technique found in Caravaggio's latest paintings. Though he is unquestionably a very enjoyable painter, whom Jordan usefully compares with Luca Forte, his Neapolitan contemporary, it is necessary to point out that these compositions are not always as impressive upon subsequent examination as they are at first, and that although the *Still Life with Basket of Fruit and Cardoon* is energetic and impressive, it seems to bear out Annibale Carracci's suspicion concerning Caravaggio's chiaroscuro technique, that it would make it too easy for artists to conceal their weaknesses.

Finally there remain two other artists who may be properly categorized as neither Caravaggists nor Cotánists, and these are Diego Velázquez and Antonio de Pereda. Like Caravaggio, Velázquez shared his century's conviction that the still-life genre was somehow inferior to other genres, like history painting, and so the moment he found that he was able to succeed in that more prestigious category, by becoming Painter to the King in 1623, he swiftly abandoned the less glorious labors of his youth. Since it is too painful to consider by how much we should have been the richer if Velázquez's abandonment of the genre had not been so total, it will suffice to express the gratitude we must feel for the few still lifes that we do possess, of which two were on view in Fort Worth. These paintings, *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary,* and *Two Young Men at Table,* are not perhaps as beautiful as *The Old Woman Frying Eggs* and *The Water Seller of Seville,* but they nevertheless display to advantage Velázquez's skill—which he would presently transfer to the renderings of flesh and fabric—in capturing the sheen of a fish's scales or the lustrous whiteness of an egg. The humble subject matter of these works was suggested to Velázquez by the works of Caravaggio, and if comparisons with his still-life passages are sought, probably the nearest contemporary we will find is Frans Snyders, the collaborator of Rubens, or perhaps Luca Forte, once again, who just a little later is recorded painting similar fish in Naples.

Since our concern in these two paintings is with still lifes, one is grateful to be able to pass swiftly over the figures in these two compositions, which have all the vices of Caravaggism with few of its virtues. But the excellence of the still-life passages in the early works of Velázquez is, if not greater, at least different from that of all the other artists represented in Fort Worth. There is already here something far more earthen

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and material in his conception of the physical world than is to be found in the works of the other artists. In a country almost proverbial for its spiritual proclivities and extravagant religiosity, the Spanish still-life painters of the first half of the seventeenth century all perceive the world through their own highly individualized faculties, each projecting upon the objects of his contemplation some unmistakable stamp of his own deepest emotional preoccupations. We have seen the eschatological dramas of Cotán, with the cardoon as Prince Hamlet, and we shall find in Pereda something of the tumescent Baroque fever dreams of Calderon, wherein the objects of the world present themselves to us through a kind of diffused focus. Only in Velázquez do we see the faculties of perception matched perfectly to their object; his light flows through nothing, etherealizes nothing as it passes, nor yields in any degree to the mysterious envelopment of shadow. Light and shade are deployed only to affirm the impenetrable solidity of everything in their path. Nothing in the whole exhibition is quite as solid as the mortar and pestle in the hands of the melancholy Mary, and there is nothing delicate or fragile in the brilliantly white eggshells which, together with the deep green baked earthenware and the scales of the dead fish, seem too heavy to receive light, and can only throw it back at us. Surely it is this complete absence of the informing, mediating vision, rather than any compositional or chromatic originality, that has been fundamental to our cherished belief in the proverbial contemporaneity of Velázquez.

Of all the artists discussed so far, Antonio de Pereda worked furthest into the century, and, with his gently diffused light and soft renderings of objects, he is very much the contemporary of Murillo and the wildly eccentric Valdés Leal. Pereda is by far the most literary of all the Spanish still-life painters in the first half of the seventeenth century, and in an area of Spanish painting to which iconologists have responded far too avidly, Pereda would genuinely seem to repay their attention. His subject matter is different from that of the other artists and even the shapes of his canvases, such as the round panel he uses for *Walnuts,* is somewhat unusual. The work in question, as its title would suggest, is a virtuosically graphic depiction of walnuts, in which the artist has gone to great lengths to evoke the oily rubberiness of the nut's meat, preserving each runnel on the rough surface of the nutshell, and contrasting this with the smooth interior. The walnuts are portrayed brightly emerging from a darkness scarcely less bleak than that of Cotán, though the recessions into shadow and depth are far more conventional. How differently would Velázquez have seen these nuts, depicting them with that imperturbably solid sensibleness, without bringing himself unduly into the work at hand. But Pereda has endowed these walnuts with his highly idiosyncratic granularity, a beautiful but slightly unnatural artifice by which the artist's personality is externalized in all he contemplates, creating a kind of screen between the viewer and the mediated reality that he looks upon.

Surely no one would fail to be impressed by the similarity that Pereda has conjured up between these walnuts and the finely conceived skulls of his next painting, which is called in the catalogue *Vanitas,* the traditional name given to those still lifes that convey, either through suggestiveness or through symbolic allusion, a sense of the breathless transience of earthly existence. Like the walnuts, these skulls are tilted toward the viewer at an unnatural slant, and recede by similar degrees from beige to brown to black. The compelling gruesomeness of these skulls is enhanced by the bizarre angles at which they address the viewer, so that they are not at first recognizable for what they are, and the mind has to disentangle the elements before it can be certain that it is not dealing with some rough-rinded fruit. Here we are confronted with an ominous oculus formed by the deep cavity that once played host to a spinal column, while a horseshoe configuration in due course collects itself into an upper mandible. Pereda has suggested the element

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of Time by placing in the foreground one of those beautifully filigreed silver and gold clocks that he often likes to include, whose granular impastations establish in them an organic link with the similarly textured skulls.

Among Spanish still-life painters of the Golden Age, Pereda is rare in his habitual depiction of nonperishable objects, and also for his inclusion of allegorical figures. In one of the grandest compositions to be shown in this exhibition, also an example of Vanitas painting, Pereda has taken to the limits his utter love of the minute and intricate rendering of cuirasses, globes, muskets, skulls, and dreary tomes, uniquely requiring two tables for their display instead of just one. He has set them revolving around the presiding angel's lucent white sleeve, which, in its lustrous factuality, reveals a Pereda who has momentarily awakened from his habitual dreaminess, to the extent that he is brought into proximity to Velázquez.

Two other compositions, entitled *Still Life with Fruits,* and *Still Life with Vegetables* (the latter of which was procured at the last minute when the painting of the walnuts could not appear), are not only very beautiful but also unique to this exhibition in being composed according to formal principles entirely different from those of the other works. Many of the still lifes in Fort Worth—those, for example, by Blas de Ledesma and the early Juan van der Hamen—are based upon a simple notion of symmetry, with two equal and lateral components flanking a clearly defined central axis. Other artists, like Francisco de Palacios and Antonio Ponce in his *Kitchen Still Life,* follow the example of Dutch artists like Pieter Claesz in distributing their objects unsystematically across the canvas, according to a more or less arbitrary sense of what will work efficiently. A third category, comprising the works of Cotán and the later Van der Hamen, places autonomous objects throughout the paintings, rather as Mondrian placed his squares and rectangles, so that, without being symmetrical, one half of the canvas will equal precisely the weight of the other half when all its components are added up. But in the two compositions we now have before us, Pereda has done something that is as beautiful as it is rare, using a principle of composition that was initiated in the generation before by Masaccio and brought to an early perfection in his *Adoration of the Magi* of the Pisan polyptych. This principle became progressively less frequent the further one went from the High Renaissance, and was almost nonexistent in application to still-life painting. Here composition is striving not for anything as elementary as mere balance but rather for a dynamic integration of all the elements of the painting into a fused and organic whole that can be conceived in terms of lines and circles and stars. In this respect it is not unlike other compositions, except that here, and this is the crucial difference, a circle will be formed by a very subtle and yet wholly artificial coincidence of the various degrees of curvature of the objects, until a sense of rondure impresses the viewer consciously if he knows what to look for, and unconsciously if he does not.

And so, if we take the fine *Still Life with Fruits* as our example, we find that its striking compositional force consists in two strongly intersecting diagonals, whose movements are abetted and reinforced by ancillary diagonals often created with nothing more than a stray twig. A diagonal from top left to bottom right is formed by the gray neck of the jug linked visually by twigs to the yellow fruit in the basket, whose weavings in turn link that fruit to another pear-like fruit that has been sliced open and that links itself, via an artichoke, to a gleaming white piece of paper that concludes the diagonal. The same principle could be applied to the other main diagonal, as well as to those minor diagonals that always flow counter to the main artery to which they are connected but whose motion they check, while at the same time promoting its counter-diagonal. By this intricate network of criss-crossings, Pereda has generated in the very midst of nature something that in its abstract harmonies can be said to have achieved its independence from any natural order.

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An objective evaluation of the fine and passionate still lifes in Fort Worth would be constrained to admit that, for all their beauty, taken together they fall a little below the aggregate achievement of contemporary Northern or Italian still-life painters. There are numerous exceptions, of course, in the dramas of Cotán, the minute delineations of Van der Hamen, the rich evocations and compositional sophistication of Pereda, and of course in Velázquez. But the still-life painters of Spain are neither as various nor as inventive as their foreign rivals; their principal strength lies in their observation and suggestion of an object's physical properties, though even in this they do not often equal the high standards of the Italian, Dutch, and Flemish masters. The compositional formulae that they have invented for their still lifes, in comparison with, say, Bosschaert's formula for flowers, or Claesz's for objects on a table, or Baschenis's for musical instruments, are never especially inspired, and thus never attracted a conspicuously illustrious following. Even relative to their own native properties these formulae rarely seem to have been brought, either by their inventors or their followers, to any form that might be considered definitive. But after these concessions are made to the critical record, it must be said that the achievement of the Spanish still-life painters in the first half of the seventeenth century is much greater than was imagined until recently, and that like all good examples of their genre, the works that were displayed at the Kimbell Museum in Fort Worth had the power not only to delight the viewer with their artistry, but also to reinvigorate his sense of the material world around him.

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Hemingway's prelude to Paris

by Bruce Bawer

Many of us are curious about the lives that great writers led when they were young, but some are curious for different reasons than others. There are those who are genuinely interested in the personal circumstances that give rise to great art, who are captivated by the spectacle of a young person discovering his talent, deciding what use he will make of it, and developing a mature and triumphant creative vision. Then there are those who, being indifferent to the germination of genius, are diverted by the inside gossip, by the sexy tidbits, by the miraculous metamorphosis of a nobody from Dublin, Dorset, St. Louis, or St. Paul into an immortal—and the closer it all comes to a Judith Krantz novel, the better. Alas, the biographers and memoirists who have chronicled Ernest Hemingway's fitful and flaming youth in the wake of Charles A. Fenton's pioneering study, *The Apprenticeship of Ernest Hemingway: The Early Years* (1954), have tended to provide more sustenance for the Judith Krantz fans than for the bona fide admirers of the literary art.

Now a young scholar named Peter Griffin has furnished us with yet another account of Ernest Hemingway's boyhood and young manhood, entitled *Along with Youth: Hemingway, the Early Years.*[1] The book—whose title is that of an unfinished 1925 novel about Nick Adams as well as of an unremarkable poem that appeared in Hemingway's first published book, the 1923 *Three Stories and Ten Poems* ("Yesterday's Tribune is gone/ Along with youth," etc.)—covers Hemingway's life until 1921. That was the year when Hemingway, aged twenty-two, left America for an eight-year residence in Paris, where he would meet, befriend, and learn from Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, Ford Madox Ford, and F. Scott Fitzgerald, and write his two best novels (*The Sun Also Rises* and *A Farewell to Arms*) and all but two or three of his best stories. As the prologue to these years in Paris, then, the years chronicled in *Along with Youth* are of great interest to every admirer of Hemingway.

They are of interest for other reasons, too. The more one reads about these early years, for one thing, the more one finds oneself thinking about a contemporary of Hemingway's whom many would consider his opposite: T. S. Eliot. The parallels and contrasts between the two men's lives and literary methods are intriguing and instructive. Like Eliot, his senior by eleven years, Hemingway was a child of the urban Midwest, the pampered scion of a well-to-do, socially prominent, and unsufferably proper family of high Victorian temper. This Victorianism notwithstanding, however, Hemingway's mother (Grace Hall-Hemingway, as she signed herself) was, like Eliot's mother, "liberated," ambitious, pious, possessive, and emotionally demanding, which may help to

1 *Along with Youth: Hemingway, the Early Years,* by Peter Griffin; Oxford University Press, 275 pages, $17.95.

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explain why both writers developed such a detached, hostile attitude toward women.

The paths that Eliot and Hemingway took from these unorthodox-yet-proper homes to literary distinction diverged early: whereas Eliot left St. Louis for the Milton Academy and Harvard College, Hemingway departed the Chicago suburb of Oak Park at eighteen to receive his higher education as a cub reporter on the seamy streets of Kansas City and as an ambulance driver in Italy during World War I (where he became the first American to be wounded on the Italian front). Yet both Eliot and Hemingway—who, after the war, returned to Chicago to work in an advertising agency—felt the need, as their literary careers loomed before them, to take their talents, and their considerable ambitions, to Europe. (After which, except for a handful of brief visits, neither would return to his hometown.) It was there that both of them—Eliot in London in 1911, Hemingway in Paris a decade later—began, with the assistance and encouragement of Ezra Pound, to make significant (and extensively imitated) contributions to the modern movement, and to establish elaborate public images that seemed designed, at least in part, to proclaim how far they had come from their middle-American origins.

But how different those images, how antithetical the ways in which the two writers embodied the modern spirit! Each modeled his celebrated persona, to an extent, upon one of the two great masters of late nineteenth-century American fiction. Whereas Eliot's prototype was the elegant, hypercivilized Henry James, Hemingway's was the plainspoken, ungenteel Mark Twain (whose *Huckleberry Finn* he saw as the ancestor of the modern American novel). And whereas Eliot, in his increasingly symbolistic poetry, attempted to build a structure of meaning around the "void" at the center of his soul by employing high-flown abstractions and recondite vocables, Hemingway took the opposite approach. In his positivistic prose, he sought to combat the "nada" at the heart of existence by banishing what he saw as the brittle fabrications of the intellect and relating, in language as pared-down as possible, the purest and simplest of sense impressions. These methods shared a single purpose: to isolate Truth—which, to Eliot and Hemingway alike, was the most valuable and elusive of commodities—in a world of doubt and confusion. It was, to a degree, this acute consciousness of the evasiveness of knowledge that inspired both of them to cultivate a semblance of authority—one as pedagogue, the other as Papa.

Of the two great writers, Eliot is invariably considered the more difficult. Yet somehow his achievement has always seemed easier to describe and to appreciate than that of Hemingway. Like the armies of second-rate, imitative American novelists who, in the middle decades of the century, behaved as if a terse, tough-sounding style was all one needed to emulate *The Sun Also Rises,* all too many of Hemingway's critics have been guided by the assumption that his achievement can be explained by one simple formula or another. Leftist critics such as Malcolm Cowley, for example, have long insisted upon reading Hemingway's *oeuvre* as a nihilistic "criticism of society"—specifically, of modern Western society—and as a wholesale condemnation of that society's imperialistic wars. The conservative critic Kenneth Lynn, for his part, while justly taking Cowley to task for his "critical extravagances," has imprudently attempted to downplay the importance of war as a theme in Hemingway's work. This is a difficult task indeed, for war is clearly at the center of all but one of his novels. *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) takes place during World War I, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) during the Spanish Civil War; *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) details the lingering postwar effects of Jake Barnes's battle injury; *Across the River and into the Trees* (1950) is grounded in Robert Cantwell's memories of the First World War; and *Islands in the Stream* (1970) traces Thomas Hudson's gradual movement toward involvement in World War II. Significantly, the sole Hemingway novel that is not concerned with war is *To Have and Have Not* (1937), which is

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widely—and correctly—regarded as Hemingway's major departure from his characteristic manner, the result of a temporary, and aesthetically lamentable, capitulation to the fashionable socialism of the mid-Thirties.

It is, then, unreasonable to deny that Hemingway's fiction is preoccupied with war; but it is equally unreasonable to assume, with Cowley, that this preoccupation necessarily implies a criticism of twentieth-century Western civilization or an endorsement of socialism. On the contrary, in Hemingway's most enduring and representative fiction, war is not an ideological but an anthropological phenomenon—not a darkly revealing manifestation of twentieth-century Western society but an inescapable consequence of human character. To Hemingway, human life, at its richest, represents a shuttling back and forth between two distinct states of being: on the one hand, the order, stability, and discipline of civilization; on the other, the primitive, often mortal, rituals (such as bullfighting, boxing, fishing, and hunting) by means of which one maintains one's connection with the elemental foundation upon which civilization is erected. And war, as the ultimate ritual, is an inevitable part of life. As such, it is neither good nor bad—or, if one prefers, is both good *and* bad. At any rate, it abideth forever, like the earth, occasioning meaningless death and meaningful heroism alike.

It should be no surprise, then, that Hemingway's narrators and characters are frequently drawing parallels between war and other rituals. In *For Whom the Bell Tolls,* Pablo compares the perils of combat to those of bullfighting: "Within the danger [of war] there is the safety of knowing what chances to take. It is like the bull fighter who knowing what he is doing, takes no chances and is safe." In *The Sun Also Rises,* Robert Cohn asks, "Can you bet on bull-fights?" and Jake answers: "It would be like betting on the war. You don't need any economic interest." In *Islands in the Stream,* Hudson's son David, after a bloody, hours-long struggle with a big fish, describes the curious feeling that all these rituals engender in the soul of a true-blue Hemingway character: "In the worst parts, when I was the tiredest I couldn't tell which was him and which was me . . . . Then I began to love him more than anything on earth . . . . Really love him . . . . I loved him so much when I saw him coming up that I couldn't stand it . . . . All I wanted was to see him closer."

In these paradoxical sentences resides the essence of Hemingway's ethos: to his mind, sex and war, bullfighting and deep-sea fishing, are life-giving as well as life-taking, enriching as well as depleting, possessed of a dark virtue and a terrible beauty. Each of these rituals is at once a contest of individual wills, a way of strengthening oneself, and a means of reasserting the bonds of common existence. And the art with which Hemingway treats of these matters is one not of unmitigated despair or of shrill condemnation but, rather, of stoic resolution; it is an art that accepts as a given both the difficulty and the value of human life, an art that honors the qualities of character that make it possible for a man not only to endure but, by sheer force of will, to give life order and infuse it with meaning.

How did Ernest Hemingway happen to grow into such a writer? That's the question Peter Griffin claims to be intrigued by, and he insists that *Along with Youth* came into being precisely because previous Hemingway biographers failed to answer this question adequately.

> On October 28, 1977, I wrote a six-line note to Mary Hemingway. I told her I wanted to write my dissertation at Brown University on her husband because his works had meant a lot to me during the hardest times of my life. I said I knew most scholars agreed that Hemingway had been "done." But I said I could not find the author of *In Our Time, The Sun Also Rises,* and *A Farewell to Arms* in the biographies I had read.

So Griffin tells us at the beginning of his preface. And so far, so good. But what sort of person does Griffin think wrote *In Our*

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Time and *The Sun Also Rises*? What nuances of character does he believe eluded his predecessors in the Hemingway-biography game? He doesn't say. He *never* says. If he has a clear vision of Hemingway, he has kept it to himself. One might suppose his epigraph, from *Sons and Lovers,* would provide a clue: "He was the sort of boy that becomes a clown and a lout as soon as he is not understood, or feels himself held cheap, and again is adorable at the first touch of warmth." We are, one assumes, supposed to understand that this is what the young Hemingway was like; but there is hardly a single sentence in Griffin's book that would seem to support it. Nowhere does he suggest that a tendency to alternate between clownishness and adorableness was the young Hemingway's signal trait, or that this trait is, somehow, the key to comprehending the man or his work.

It is difficult, in fact, to figure out, from Griffin's diffuse, imperceptive, and directionless book, *what* he makes of the young Hemingway. In reaction, one imagines, to Carlos Baker's surefooted standard biography, *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story* (1969) —and with misguided reverence, perhaps, for Hemingway's own reluctance to inject interpretative remarks into his novels and stories—Griffin makes a point of offering very little in the way of analysis or commentary. He concentrates, rather, upon the accumulation of details. But since he is not Hemingway, his tireless (and ludicrously unselective) gathering of minutiae adds up to a good deal less than one has a right to expect from such a book as this. To be sure, there is new material in *Along with Youth,* drawn from letters that have only recently come to light, and this new material appears to be the biography's principal *raison d'être* as well as its chief selling point. Thanks to this material, the book has received considerable advance publicity. A recent *New York Times* article by Edwin McDowell, for example, announced to the world that Griffin's book would be "based upon a number of previously unpublished documents, including some 2,000 pages of unpublished letters," most of them between Hemingway and his first wife, Hadley Richardson, and his friend Bill Horne. But what McDowell neglected to add was that this body of correspondence, for all its bulk, is surprisingly unrevealing. Griffin seems to have found it easy to ignore this fact; he is apparently starstruck by Hemingway, is thrilled to have met the great man's surviving friends and relatives, and—however useless these letters may be—is overwhelmed by the fact that he is the first scholar to have been permitted to use them.

And use them he has. Indeed, while the first half of his book, covering Hemingway's first eighteen years, draws for the most part upon the same sources as Baker's biography, the second half, which deals with Hemingway's nineteenth through twenty-second years, consists almost entirely of paraphrases of and quotations from the letters. This is unfortunate, partly because most of the letters are not from Hemingway but from Hadley, partly because they were written during a relatively brief period (eight months or so), and partly because this period (the first part of 1921, when Hemingway was working at his despised advertising job) was arguably among the most uninteresting of the writer's adult life. But it is unfortunate most of all because, like most *billets-doux,* Hadley's letters to Ernest, when quoted from in such abundance, make very dull and unenlightening reading for a third party. If these letters prove anything at all, it is that Hadley was indeed very much enamored of her "Nesto." To this end, of course, two or three quoted sentences would have more than sufficed; instead, Griffin gives us fifty or so pages, the highlights of which read more or less as follows:

> I think you are the nicest lover a person ever had, really. I feel matched up and appreciated and taken care of the way I did the night I rolled so fast and scaredly down the sand dune in the dark and you whirled me up and kissed me . . . . I want to be picked up now Ernest. I want you here tonight around me. I feel small and lovely and lonely (but happy) 'cause I know that if you were here you would be

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> around me and domestic and needing to be necessary. Do you ever feel that way about me. Big and lonely, only, and needing?

That's on page 150; on 153, we get this:

> I'm so terribly in need of just such an adorable warm-hearted sweet and tender darling to love me. But even more than that I need someone to give my lots and lots of lovingness to . . . . It's probably very prehistoric in me but I do think I can't get along without awfully much worshiping the goodness in a man I'm to love for always. I have such an initiative, healthy, put the other fellow first, kind of goodness and you have a heart that I undoubtedly adore!

And on it goes. On the next page, Hadley assures Ernest that "There isn't any arms in the world I want around me as much as yours. There's no heart like yours for me." She explains that she loves him "so highly and lowly and like a boy and girl warmly," and that she finds it "so hard to mail these letters. It's like putting yourself in the mailbox." She wants "to be walking with you in a forest. A very soft dark green. There would be things to do there that would be more beautiful than anywhere else."

Unarguably, it's all very sweet and lovely —but to include every word, unedited, in a literary biography is absolutely ridiculous. This is not to say that Griffin confines himself to Ernest and Hadley's declarations of love; he also offers us reams of miscellaneous material that is perhaps best classified as Amazingly Trivial. We learn, for example, that on a certain evening Hadley went to a Douglas Fairbanks movie, that on another occasion she met a man (unnamed) who slouched and smoked a pipe, that at a party somebody named Dick "flirted with Pete Rowland's girl," that Hadley played "Malagene, Jeux d'Eaux, and a Brahms ballad" on the University Club's piano. In letter after letter, we find out what Hadley had for dinner, whom she played tennis with, what streets her various friends lived on.

Throughout all of this, Griffin hovers far in the background, comporting himself less like a biographer than like a humble medieval scribe, dutifully copying out his sacred texts, word for prosaic word, reverently preserving for posterity each redundancy-choked passage, each trifling anecdote, each obscure allusion. When, every so often, a letter actually raises an interesting question or two, Griffin almost invariably refuses to take it up. In many of Ernest's letters to Hadley, for instance, he goes out of his way to drop the names of women that he has been seeing in Chicago. In particular, there is one Kate Smith, who is in love with him, and with whom he socializes a great deal. (And who, years later, will marry John Dos Passos.) Instead of being upset, though, when Ernest throws Kate's love for him in her face, Hadley is strangely saint-like, suggesting in all seriousness that Kate is "[w]orth about three of me . . . and [would] probably be a better lover and worker for you, and everything. My but it's queer the way things happen, and if you didn't want me pretty hard, as I think you do, I'd make you throw me over and do yourself justice." A letter or two like this is enough to convince one that Hemingway's relationship with Hadley had its intriguing aspects, all right, and if only Griffin had chosen to select a few key passages from these letters for rigorous examination and intelligent discussion, he might have produced an enlightening book and actually added something worthwhile to the burgeoning storehouse of Hemingway scholarship. But that's not his style. Like Matthew J. Bruccoli, the literary scholar who has made a name for himself by writing gigantic biographies and compiling obscure documents of dubious value (among his productions is a collection of the articles young Hemingway wrote for the Oak Park High School newspaper), Griffin seems to believe that the best way to understand a great writer is to accumulate every word he ever wrote and to publish it, with unscholarly fanfare, under one's own name.

I have not yet mentioned that *Along with Youth* contains, in addition to all those letters, the complete texts of five short sto-

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ries—"The Mercenaries," "Crossroads: An Anthology," "The Ash-Heel's Tendon," "Portrait of the Idealist in Love," and "The Current"—which Hemingway wrote in 1919 and 1920, when he was twenty and twenty-one. For reasons that should be obvious to anyone, but that are not obvious to Griffin, Hemingway never published any of these stories in his lifetime. Griffin has remedied this situation, and doubly so: aside from printing them in *Along with Youth,* he has cooperated in their publication in *The New York Times Magazine,* where they appeared in the issue of August 18, 1985, with an introduction by Griffin himself. In *Along with Youth,* since Griffin is not the type to relegate anything by Hemingway to a mere appendix, the stories appear, peculiarly enough, as part of the text; when the appropriate chronological point arrives, Griffin interrupts his biographical narrative, gives us a story, then resumes the biography without so much as a word of comment about the interruption. It's a very peculiar format, reminiscent of Hemingway's *In Our Time* (1925), wherein the chapters of the original *in our time* (1924) were separated by short stories. The difference, of course, is that in *Along with Youth* the format makes no sense, logical or aesthetic or otherwise, and therefore doesn't work. Nor does it help that the stories are far inferior to those collected in *In Our Time.* Although they are written, for the most part, in a streetwise vernacular that recalls many a later Hemingway story (and that, incidentally, betrays the influence of Sherwood Anderson and Ring Lardner), these five early works lack both subtlety and depth. One misses, in all of them, the agonizing restraint, the calculated repetitions, the profound vision of the mature Hemingway, not to mention that crucial feeling that seven-eighths of the story is hidden beneath the surface. To see such primitive works as these, in fact, splashed across the pages of *The New York Times Magazine,* and accorded places of honor in a biography published by Oxford University Press, is, for any sincere admirer of Hemingway, a truly depressing experience.

Griffin, to be sure, acknowledges the inferiority of the early stories; but he argues, nonetheless, that they show Hemingway "discover[ing] a voice that soon would speak for a generation." The stories, he claims, disprove Gertrude Stein's contention that "she and Sherwood Anderson had 'formed' Hemingway." Insists Griffin: "What ended with 'The Old Man and the Sea' began with 'The Mercenaries,' 'The Ash-Heel's Tendon,' and 'Crossroads.'" This is pure hype. What "The Mercenaries" and its brethren show, on the contrary, is that at the age of twenty-one, only a couple of years before producing such excellent pieces of short fiction as "My Old Man" and "Cat in the Rain," Hemingway was still perpetrating juvenilia. If anything, then, these early works tend not to disprove but to support Stein's contention that she helped mold a crude Kansas City journalist into a great author.

So skewed is Griffin's judgment in this matter, in fact, that at times one has the distinct suspicion that Griffin really does not recognize how bad these stories are, and that his much-vaunted admiration of Hemingway has at least as much to do with the magnitude of the novelist's current reputation as with the actual value of his work. What's more, for a man who claims to be so enamored of Hemingway's work—and therefore, one would assume, reasonably sensitive to the nuances of well-crafted prose—Griffin is an exceedingly unimpressive stylist. He is one of those writers who commit all the classic, avoidable errors. For example: "Shortly after Agnes left, Ernest wrote two stories he would never publish on Red Cross Headquarters stationery." He has an uneasy way not only with the English language but with punctuation marks, a failing which often causes his sentences to be clumsier than they have to be: "At supper, 'Abba' the biblical word for father as he insisted on being called—gave the blessing . . . ." And then there are the little awkwardnesses, the instances of inappropriate diction that occur a bit too frequently for comfort. On a single page (152), for example, Griffin refers to Carl Sandburg and

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Sherwood Anderson as "nightlights of the Chicago renaissance," tells us that Anderson "had accomplished *Winesburg, Ohio* in 1919," describes Anderson as having rejected "the kind of life Ernest believed Clarence Hemingway [his father, a physician] had cowardly embraced," and refers to Anderson's belief "in the salvific power of a 'good woman.'" Twice Griffin describes people as getting "purposively drunk." And sometimes he comes off as just plain addlepated, alluding several times (as if this were a most impressive statistic indeed) to the fact that Hemingway had size-eleven feet and mentioning no fewer than four times, in the course of a five-page preface, that Bill Horne's black dog is named Lena (Lena Horne, get it?)—this apparently being, to Griffin's tastes, sophisticated wit.

We are informed that *Along with Youth* is the first installment of a multiple-volume biography. A bit of arithmetic: since Baker devotes 83 of the 564 pages in his biography —or approximately one seventh of the total—to the twenty-two years covered in *Along with Youth,* we may reasonably expect, it would seem, that Griffin's masterwork has at least five, perhaps six, more volumes to go, for a grand total of about fifteen hundred pages, before it reaches that sunny morning in June of 1961 when the Hemingway story came to an end. Fifteen hundred pages: that's an average of about thirty words of biography for every single day that Hemingway lived. Think of it. And think, too, of the as-yet-unpublished documents that Griffin may quote and paraphrase at hundreds of pages' length; think of all the important facts that he may choke to death in a fog of inconsequential details before he's through. It's unsettling. One cannot help but be reminded, once again, of the remarkable Professor Bruccoli. Unsurprisingly, it is Bruccoli himself whom Griffin cites, in his *New York Times Magazine* introduction, by way of defending his publication of the early Hemingway stories: "As the Hemingway scholar Matthew J. Bruccoli has written, 'Everything Ernest Hemingway wrote is of importance because he wrote it.'" Yes—it is of importance to scholars, as background information which may or may not provide insights into Hemingway's life and character. But important as literature—important to readers of biographies and of major newspapers? Certainly not.

What it all comes down to is that Peter Griffin is less interested than he should be in the question of how Hemingway's early years helped make him the sort of writer he was. And he is more interested than he should be in some matters that many would consider the stuff of gossip—in the fact that Hemingway and Hadley apparently slept together before their marriage, for instance, or in the revelation that Hemingway's wartime romance with his nurse Agnes Kurowski (the prototype of Catherine Barkley, the heroine of *A Farewell to Arms*) was somewhat hotter and heavier than many critics have assumed. The simplemindedness and sensationalism of this approach is particularly regrettable because there is, manifestly, a significant story to be told about Hemingway's first twenty-two years and their impact upon his mature writings. Among other things, the writer of a responsible and useful book about these years would have made a greater effort to understand Hemingway's hostility toward his mother, his ambivalent feelings about his father (who, like Ernest, committed suicide), his fascination with the Indian life of upper Michigan (which plays such a large role in his earliest Paris stories as well as in *The Torrents of Spring*), and the complicated ways in which his war experience (which was clearly both traumatic and liberating) contributed to his development as a man and young writer and set him on much the same road as Eliot—toward self-exile in Europe and the advancement of literary modernism. If *Along with Youth* is such a disappointment, then, it is not because Griffin has, like many literary scholars these days, chosen for himself a ridiculously arcane topic, but because he has taken a subject so worthy of exploration and has failed to take it seriously enough. The authoritative book about the young Ernest Hemingway has yet to be written.

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A profound simplicity: the poetry of Andrew Young

by Leslie Norris

Andrew Young, at once the most accessible and secretive of modern poets, was born at Elgin in Scotland on April 29, 1885. The appearance of *The Poetical Works of Andrew Young,* edited by the poet's daughter Alison Young and her husband Edward Lowbury, is an apt celebration of his centenary year.[1] The collection is a model of painstaking accuracy and thoughtful arrangement and supersedes the *Complete Poems* of 1974. Not only have the editors ordered the poems into a more cohesive and logical pattern, but they include work not to be found in earlier versions of Young's collected poems. It seems unlikely that they have missed anything of even minor importance.

Tennyson was still at work when Young was born. As a student Young was to mourn the death of Swinburne; and he was an exact contemporary of D.H. Lawrence. Yet he lived long enough—since he lived until 1971—to be writing after the death of Dylan Thomas. In the 1960s, visiting an Oxford bookshop, he was amused to hear a student declare that he was about "to lead the way back to Auden." He should have been a poet whose work was considered alongside that of the War Poets—he served himself in the war of 1914-1918—and there is indeed some resemblance between the poems of Young and those of Edward Thomas. But his firm unwillingness to show his work to any but the smallest audience—his wife, a very few friends—meant that he was in the early postwar years unrecognized as a poet.

In other ways, Young was a modern poet. This may well be because he seems to have had two careers, or more correctly, his career is sharply divided. Until his middle years he allowed his work to appear only privately, in a succession of small collections. It was not until relatively late in life that a substantial number of poems was made generally available, and he began to receive adequate critical attention. He soon had an enthusiastic and loyal following. In due course he was to be awarded the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry and the Gold Medal of The Royal Society of Literature.

The first half of his career concerns the poems published between 1910 and 1931 in a series of small books, pamphlets almost. The first of them, *Songs of Night,* was paid for by the poet's father; most of the others were published by Young's friend J.G. Wilson. These small books are now exceedingly rare, but Alison Young and Lowbury have included a solid number of early poems in their new edition, enough for us to realize that Young's deceptively simple style was with him early, as this short poem from *The New Shepherd* (1931) demonstrates:

1 *The Poetical Works of Andrew Young*—edited and with an introduction and notes by Edward Lowbury and Alison Young—was published in England by Secker & Warburg. It is available in the United States from David & Charles, Inc.—North Pomfret, Vermont 05053—for $24.

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> Thinking of those who walked here long ago
> On this greenway in summer and in snow
> She said, "This is the oldest road we tread,
> The oldest in the world?" "Yes, love," I said.
> ("On the Ridgeway")

In 1933 the Nonesuch Press issued a substantial collection of previously unpublished poems. This was the first appearance of any of Young's work from an important house, indeed from any commercial publisher, and perhaps in recognition of this the poet signed himself, for the first time, as Andrew Young. All previous volumes were written by the more anonymous A. J. Young. The Nonesuch Press book, *Winter Harvest,* signals the public recognition of Young's verse. It was widely and favorably reviewed, and from this time on Young's work gained for him a growing reputation. His work began to appear in representative anthologies, critics as severe as Geoffrey Grigson applauded him, and children in schools all over Great Britain were soon reading his poems. When *Winter Harvest* appeared Young was forty-eight years old. Two years later he published *The White Blackbird* and one year after that he added seventeen new poems to the 1933 and 1935 volumes to form the first of his *Collected Poems.* The public poet seems to have arrived. Two more volumes, *Speak to the Earth* and *The Green Man,* complete his work in the lyric form by which he is best known, but there are also verse plays of great merit and, more particularly, a remarkable long poem, *Out of the World and Back,* which Young first issued as two separate poems, *Into Hades* and *A Traveller in Time,* but which came out in its unified form in 1958. All this is clearly presented in *The Poetical Works of Andrew Young,* so that for the first time it is possible to look easily at the progress of the poet's development.

It is not that the earlier editions of the collected poems were without merit. That of 1936 was obviously too early—there was a great deal of the more important and typical work to come. That of 1950, edited by Young himself, may have been too haphazard. He has told how, when asked for his poems for that edition, he merely tipped out the contents of his drawer, tidied them into a pile, and sent them off to his publisher. But that was a most attractive collection, the first, I believe, to include the splendid wood engravings of Joan Hassall which also illustrate the new book. The 1960 volume of collected poems, edited by Leonard Clark, is an interim work, although Clark attempted to place the poems in some chronological order. In 1974, Clark edited *Complete Poems,* an ambitious but not complete collection, and one in which the poems were not clearly arranged. The present volume seems to avoid all these handicaps and gives us in addition a number of the verse plays as well as two examples of Young's poetic prose, from *The New Poly-Olbion,* a collection of short pieces celebrating the places he had visited in his many journeys throughout the British Isles in search of wild flowers.

Young remains, however, very much a private and even a mysterious figure. Perhaps the fact that he was so much older than most of the men writing and publishing at the same time made him seem more distant than in fact he was; perhaps his sturdy independence of the literary world underlined his natural reticence and reserve. His life was that of a scholar and a countryman, regular and disciplined. As a student he had thought first of the law, and then had studied fine art. But in the end he became a priest, first of the Scottish Free Church and then, after an important meeting with Bishop Bell of Chichester in Sussex, a priest of the Church of England. When he died in 1971, he was living in retirement a few miles away from Chichester Cathedral. He had long given up the art of poetry. He had written his lyrics, moved on to the different task of writing his long, religious work, "Out of the World and Back," and then stopped, his duty to poetry, he believed, over. In his study he re-read the poets he loved, Spenser, Dante, the Metaphysicals, sometimes Thomas Hardy.

Despite his youthful enthusiasm for Swinburne, whose poetry he could quote for half an hour on end, and the evidence of some Shelleyan passages in the long, early

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"Memorial Verses," Young's verse has been, almost from the first, hard, brief, spare as flint. He has been too easily called a nature poet. It is true that he was a superb observer and a fine naturalist, but he uses nature for more important purposes. He is a metaphysical poet, exploring the layers of meaning that exist within a word, now playfully, now seriously, transforming a small lyric into a profound statement by a single stroke of the imagination. And he is also a priest, aware of man's mortality and the immensity of eternity.

Each step a cataract of stones
So that I rise and sink at once,
Slowly up to the ridge I creep;
And as through drifting smoke
Of mist grey-black as hoodie-crow
The ghostly boulders come and go
And two hoarse ravens croak
That hopped with flapping wings by a dead sheep,
All is so hideous that I know
It would not kill me though I fell
A thousand feet below;
On you, Black Cuillin, I am now in hell.

("The Cuillin Hills")

That poem comes from *Speak to the Earth* (1939), possibly the most concentrated and important of Young's single volumes; and if we had this book alone, we should have evidence enough to consider him a major poet. It includes many fine pieces, such as "A Dead Mole," "Children Gathering Violets," "Passing the Graveyard," and the unforgettable and noble "A Prospect of Death." The formal simplicity of his style makes partial quotation unfair, so here is "Passing the Graveyard" in its entirety:

I see you did not try to save
The bouquet of white flowers I gave
So fast they wither on your grave.

Why does it hurt the heart to think
Of that most bitter abrupt brink
Where the low-shouldered coffins sink?

These living bodies that we wear
So change by every seventh year
That in a new dress we appear;

Limbs, spongy brain and slogging heart,
No part remains the self-same part;
Like streams they stay and still depart.

You slipped slow bodies in the past;
Then why should we be so aghast
You flung off the whole flesh at last?

Let him who loves you think instead
That like a woman who has wed
You undressed first and went to bed.

Young's wit, serious and elusive, was very much the man, and if my preference is for the poems of the intense period immediately before World War II, I have to confess that the great bulk of his work displays profound brevity and economy, breathtaking small moments. Again and again we are pulled up short by lines like "Mist that gathered from nowhere / With a bright darkness filled the air." We are made to see the shot magpie fall "with feathers heavier than lead." Young's observation of the natural world owes nothing to anyone else. He sees the world, and makes us see it, as if for the first time:

Frost called to water "Halt!"
And crusted the moist snow with sparkling salt;
Brooks, their own bridges, stop,

and we stop too, astonished by the clarity and exactness of Young's winter.

The lyrics often present a world in which Young is alone and aware of great stretches of time. Many of his poems celebrate his kinship with the men who are buried in the long barrows, those "silent men of bones." I used to think that his feeling for such ancient human beings was elegiac, that his celebration was also a mourning; but now I think not. It is almost as if he sees such men, and the dead creatures, the moles and birds he finds on his solitary walks, greatly changed but not dead. He is curious about the fact of death, but not frightened. He sees

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the closeness of life and death, he can watch death with some amusement. Hanging his hat and coat to dry on a branch after a sudden shower, he forgets about them:

> But, turning on my steps, startled I stood
> To see a dead man hanging in the wood;
> By two clear feet of air he swung afloat,
> One who had hanged himself in hat and coat.

Oh, the beautiful ambiguity of those "two clear feet of air"!

Such a poem might be a version of "A Prospect of Death," possibly Young's best short poem. Here, using an apparently orthodox form with consummate skill, he occasionally shortens a line by a syllable or two, never losing his firm rhythm, his marvelous laconic voice, and looks at his own death:

> If it should come to this,
> You cannot wake me with a kiss,
> Think I but sleep too late
> Or once again keep a cold angry state . . .

and turns the poem into a statement of personal love, a love poem of great and life-giving power:

> So do not dream of danger;
> Forgive my lateness or my anger;
> You have so much forgiven,
> Forgive me this or that, or Hell or Heaven.

Life after death is a question which concerns most of us, and Young was, say his editors, possessed of "an avidity for the afterlife." Certainly it was his own imagined death which begins "Out of the World and Back." Some critics have suggested that this poem, despite its length and its ambitious use of the great mystics, particularly Richard Rolle, remains closely allied to the lyrics, more especially in language and imagery. This, I suppose, would not be unexpected; it is hard to imagine a poet in his maturity, having refined and perfected his voice over a period of fifty years, abandoning those skills for something entirely new. Yet I'm not sure that Young doesn't seriously extend his range in this long work. The first line is startlingly direct and modern, quite unlike anything in the previous work, and reminds us that Young had lived and studied art in Paris, was not always a parish priest:

> One midnight in the Paris Underground
> Walking along the tunnel to a train,
> I saw a man leaning against the wall,
> Eyes shut, head sunk on chest; selling newspapers
> He had fallen asleep, but still stood on his feet . . . .

And the language and manner in which he describes watching his own burial, unaware that he is dead, is very effective. Nor is this all; the poem includes long passages of mystical writing of great beauty, as here, when he sees "The New Earth":

> Her beauty sparkled;
> Though I knew her for the old earth, now renewed,
> Reborn, she was so transfigured, so unearthly,
> I felt I tarnished her even with looking.
> All things were conscious, trees talking together,
> Streams their own Sirens; mountains might have moved
> Slow shoulders. Miraculously as in a dream
> She drew close to my side . . . .

I believe Young sent his papers to an American university, so I suppose it is remotely possible that there are one or two poems still uncollected in this volume. It would be nice to think of some small unknown manifestation of the work of this remarkable poet still to be found; but we have enough here to see clearly his fine and individual talent. He was never a member of the literary world, never fashionable or unfashionable. All his life he was his own man. His reputation might have been greater in his own lifetime had he gone out and worked for it, but he was a shy, a vulnerable man in many ways; and he knew the value of his work. This book should ensure that he will always have his readers.

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Poems *by Edward Case, James Aitchison, X. J. Kennedy, Jane Kenyon, Alan Shapiro & Dick Allen*

Everything is possible to the cheerful hero

I shall piss against the North Wind
And make rain in Alaska.
I shall stamp my foot—*thus*—
And give migraine to all Manchuria.
I shall spit but once in the Mississippi
And swamp the souring cane of Cuba.
Even—*forbid it*—by bursitis disjointed
I shall beat out spanking rhythms
On every mono-buttocked bum
Who squats the seat of power.
I shall do more wonders to astound you!
I shall grow avocados in a concrete mixer
Whilst pouring foundations for plastic plants.
I shall explain life to you,
As well as electricity, gravity, money,
Magnetism and the reason for fireflies.
I shall make you glad you are yourself.

Truly, everything is possible to the cheerful hero
As nothing is improbable to the sober wise:
Palmy Eden awaits his outstretched hand
And he goes to Heaven when he dies.

—Edward Case

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1914

The pearly throat of that peacock age was torn
In summer and its shriek yet grows, screaming
Unheard in all our days and deeds, like static
From a falling star, unseeming as the dust
Of space, yet crying murder as it bleeds.
So the voiceless moon imparting gravity
To frivolous tides roils the world unseen
But never hides its light nor ever slows.

Slain then the nightingale and the steed,
The garden wall then fallen, the enchanted
Wood a tiring room for weary death
And summer's lawn sown to widows' weed.
For winter came in August killing fruit and seed.
In that broken season forever died the rose.

—Edward Case

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A victory is won

When the fur-denned eye of the trancing bear
Stuck with fantastic honey opens and sees
The broken dark of shadowy tomorrow
And the first growl of life blows hunger through
The fatty air of feastless winter's dream
And the truth of claws and fleas and drool
And the scratch and hustle of the belly's urge
Lumber that monstrous sleeping bag to stretch
And shake the fearful bludgeoning paws
Deft enough to spear the silver salmon,
Tough enough to fend the fee-tree's bitter lance
And cruel enough to choke the pretty doe,
When such puissance uprises from such lumpen
Shamble, then a victory is won,
Not of the pure nor the ignoble,
But of that flesh which is the meat of stars,
That fist which flowers the bramble and milks
The Sun.

—*Edward Case*

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In a brand new Buick passing the reputed area of my grandfather's grave

My grandfather oscillant in a grave
Neither he nor I have seen,
Rocked, perhaps, by what I am
And what he might have been
Had he been the son of his son
And not my father's sire,
To what ease of body, cease of toil
He might then aspire,
Taking at first my common lot
Of property and possession
As miracle and bounty of the Lord
Blessing his succession,
Yet would he not, at six feet seventy years
And millenial mind's remove,
Seeing my yieldless discontent,
Tear his cerements, reprove
And mourn me dead as he below,
I having but exchanged his God for goods
And traded woe for woe?

—Edward Case

Minor poet

Saved by a line
Before he sank
    Into the nameless sea:
His sentence stayed,
His passage paid
    Home free.

—Edward Case

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Rewriting childhood

I am rewriting my childhood,
holding it up to my eye
like a jam jar of sticklebacks.

Sunlight catches the glass—
the fish flash crimson and silver
as they twist and gasp
in a dazzle of golden light.

I carried it home,
the secret of life in a jam jar.

I am rewriting my childhood,
editing out the next day
and the day after
when the grey-brown sticklebacks
hung belly-upwards
in a cloud of watered-down milk.

—James Aitchison

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Terse elegy for J. V. Cunningham

Now Cunningham, who rhymed by fits and starts,
So loath to gush, most sensitive of hearts—
Else why so hard-forged a protective crust?—
Is brought down to the unresponding dust.
Though with a slash a Pomp's gut he could slit,
On his own flesh he worked his weaponed wit
And penned with patient skill and lore immense,
Prodigious mind, keen ear, rare common sense,
Only those words he could crush down no more
Like matter pressured to a dwarf star's core.
May one day eyes unborn wake to esteem
His steady, baleful, solitary gleam.
Poets may come whose work more quickly strikes
Love, and yet—ah, who'll live to see his likes?

—X. J. Kennedy

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Twelve dead, scores homeless

The wind last night kept breaking into song—
Not a song, though, to comfort children by.
It picked up houses, flung them down awry,
Upended bridges, drove slow trees along
To walls.
A note so high
Removed an ear that listened. On the strand
Without a word this morning, sailors land.
White cars, their sirens off, wade silently.

Now crews inch by, restringing power lines,
Plowing aside white sparkling drifts of glass.
The wind last night kept breaking into song
Beautiful only if you heard it wrong.

—X. J. Kennedy

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Siesta at the Hotel Frattina

Mid-afternoon the sound of weeping in the hall
woke me . . . hurried steps on the stair, and a door
slamming. I put on my glasses and stared
at nothing in particular.

We had walked all morning in the Forum
among pillars, cornices, and tilting
marble floors . . . armless torsos, faces
missing their noses—all fallen awry
among the grassy knolls.

Lord Byron brooded there on his love
for Teresa Guiccioli, only nineteen,
and someone else's wife. Oh, Siren Italy.

Just then the faucet gasped.
The ceiling seemed incalculably far away.
My mind revolted at all I had bought
in the chic little alleyways of Rome.

I longed for home, and the high collars we wear
a hundred miles north of the place
where Hawthorne wrote *The Scarlet Letter.*

I even longed to be bored again,
watching the pale sun rush—all business—
over the edge of the western world
by four on a November afternoon.

—Jane Kenyon

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Familiar story

Tonight they have to be both host and stranger,
talking together all evening after dinner;
the candle burning down till they are half
in darkness as they lead each other back
through their accumulated separate lore,
telling the stories they have told before
to other lovers, who are stories now.
They give no truth here, but the practiced glow
of truthfulness: even as they confess
whole-heartedly to niggling attentiveness
disguised as love, to no or too much care,
affection parcelled out till it's not there—
the more one tells, the more the other sees
just how appealing is this honesty,
how generous they are to those who hurt them.
They think this kind shrewd vision won't desert them.
And tonight, at least, it won't, as they forget
what all their lore will lead them to expect
of one another, what they will later owe
day after each slow day when all they know
is the familiar story they are living,
restless, and remote, and unforgiving.
It's then, when they don't feel it, they will need
the love bad days require, and impede.
But not tonight, the candle dying down,
their eyes shut briefly as the light goes on.
Tonight desire's generosity,
desire in each other's all they see,
and all else now is no more than the light
hurting their eyes, too sudden and too bright.

—Alan Shapiro

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Cities & empires

The secret is not to move, the lady said,
But sometimes you can turn your head away
For a minute, then back, as you do to really watch
A sunset, and you do this several times, and then
You can feel the dark on your eyes like a cold cloth.

That's how it was, she said. When the soldiers went by—
Straight lines of them, like holes in a cribbage board;
Men no older than my boy they caused to vanish—
I stood, but stared at nothing. Others told me
A haze of apple petals fell about them slowly.

And when I looked back, they were gone. The road
Was empty, save for cars with blackened seats,
And a body or two. It was comforting, that quiet,
For I was thinking of coffee, I was thinking
Of holding my hands around a cup of coffee.

You must do it, after all, she said—your eating,
Washing, sleeping, suffering. The mind has little rooms
It rents out to the body, and at times
You go there, no one follows you, the shades are drawn,
Dust falls like fingers from each one you touch.

—Dick Allen

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Art

The Twilight Zone

by Jed Perl

This past summer the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, D.C., mounted a show of works by sixteen contemporary European artists who use representational subject matter. Joe Shannon, Chief of the Department of Exhibits and Design at the Hirshhorn, organized "Representation Abroad" and wrote the catalogue.[1] Shannon's entries on the individual artists are the work of someone who clearly loves painting and sculpture, and he's anxious to have us judge the work included on its own merits. In the preface he bends over backward declaring this is not a thesis show. Reading the catalogue, I had the feeling Shannon sees the lack of a thesis as a point in his favor; he believes the unpolemical selection of artists in "Representation Abroad" will have a special appeal for people who are turned off by glitz and hype. "Some of these artists," Shannon writes, "are surely for the ages; some, sadly, will be forgotten. As always, time will tell." Shannon doesn't promise us the moon. He just wants to get together some artists that he likes, and there's surely nothing wrong in such a simple idea.

Who wouldn't be happy with a show of sixteen really interesting European painters and sculptors? But when I left the Hirshhorn, I had the same impression as when I'd arrived: that there aren't sixteen—or even half that number—important representational artists left working in Europe. The principal players here—Avigdor Arikha, Tibor Csernus, David Hockney, and Rodrigo Moynihan—have all been seen in New York, as have some of the Neo-Expressionists Shannon includes, such as Luciano Castelli, Klaus Fussmann, and Nino Longobardi. Shannon's show doesn't reveal anything fresh about these artists, nor does he have any significant new artists up his sleeve.

Taken at a glance, "Representation Abroad" has the look of a bland, all-American realist salon of the 1930s or 1940s. A few X-rated nudes might not quite have passed muster back then, but the exhibition's note of slightly off-key sexuality isn't too far from the spirit of academic salons, where virtuosity slipped gently into pornography. If there's bright, slap-happy painting here and there, most of Shannon's artists share with toilers of earlier decades a certain murky, chalky color and a penchant for laborious, overdone effects. Some painting in "Representation Abroad" might even make you yearn for the old American corn—maybe for the New York interiors of John Koch. Koch, who died in 1978, had an annoyingly finicky way of handling paint; but at least when you think about his pictures they evoke a time and a place—the famous Eastside cocktail-hour ambience—and you feel the pressure of a lived experience. I'm not sure I can

1 "Representation Abroad" was on view at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden from June 5 to September 2. The exhibition's catalogue was published by the Smithsonian Institution Press: 223 pages, $15 (paperback).

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say as much for anything in "Representation Abroad."

One of the artists Shannon includes, the Italian sculptor Francesco Messina, was born in 1900 and was actually exhibiting in the 1930s and 1940s. His sculptures of boys, girls, and animals are frothy garden decor, and I didn't really think about them until I opened the catalogue and found that Messina's entry begins with words of praise from Jean Cocteau. This statement is dated 1959, so Cocteau was pretty far gone; it's one of those homages which suggest a certain equivocation through the absence of much direct discussion of the artist's work. Shannon confesses in his catalogue that friends of his disapproved of the inclusion of Messina, and I doubt anyone is going to care about Messina or what Cocteau says about him. But the element of authentication Cocteau imparts to Messina is only an extreme example of a search for pedigrees one finds all through "Representation Abroad." Cocteau is brought in making comments that don't matter about art that doesn't matter because he is, in other contexts, a significant and useful figure. The way Cocteau functions for Messina is the way Europe functions for the entire cast of "Representation Abroad."

In the case of Luis Marsans—who's associated, like a number of these artists, with the Claude Bernard Gallery of Paris and now also of New York—art appears to be an exotic European parlor game: the last gasp of the Bohemian bourgeoisie. Marsans's illustrations for Proust are matching tricks in which a character or situation in *Remembrance of Things Past* is related to a particular artist's style: Mme Verdurin is done à la Toulouse-Lautrec, the narrator's grandmother is a Rembrandt, Balbec is Whistlerian, and Proust himself is done in the manner of an ink wash by Manet. More recently, Marsans has been concentrating on still lifes of bookshelves. I assume the books belong to the artist, and that, as with the Proust illustrations, we're meant to note how erudite Marsans is.

In "Representation Abroad" European culture provides a justification for what contemporary European artists have set out to do. The Parisian and Provençal studios, the friendships and connections within the English art world—these have a certain exoticism for us over here. Art floats across the Atlantic on a stream of shining associations. One notices the name of Samuel Beckett in Avigdor Arikha's bibliography.

Though some general idea of culture adheres to the work of the better artists in "Representation Abroad," the culture of painting, which consists of the imaginative use of materials of the artist, isn't much in evidence. Arikha and Moynihan, who paint portraits, still lifes, and interiors, know how to bring out the charm in mundane subjects, but the surfaces of their pictures are sad, unresonant. Arikha favors an all-over scumbling which gives his work, despite its casual, slightly rumpled appearance, a certain illusion of unity; you always know what the next area will bring. Most everywhere in his urban interiors Arikha lets bits of white underpainting show through, and every contour is given the same nervous treatment. Moynihan outlines still-life objects in a way that sets my teeth on edge. His brownish lines are either inscribed with a straight edge or twitched on in little passages of handwriting. In Arikha's and Moynihan's vignettes from the artists' everyday life you keep coming back to these matters of paint-handling because the color doesn't take you beyond them. Both Arikha and Moynihan have done still lifes with light bulbs where a delicate allegory is probably intended. The artist is a creator of light, too, we are told, though Arikha's tendency to associate light with white, and Moynihan's mostly seasick gray-green tones, don't get much sparkle going. Their bits of color are invariably local. These artists don't make light out of color, but then no one in "Representation Abroad" does. Hockney uses *only* planes of bright color, and these are meant to bounce off one another and create explosions of light in a School of Paris manner. But no matter how fast Hockney's colors change—green-blue to purple-blue, orange to pink—each weighs

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in the same. Hockney's colors don't have separate personalities or distinct voices, and despite all the promised bounce, their harmonies are leaden.

Anyone who's written about painting knows that color has an elusive quality—at once visceral and spiritual—that can't readily be caught in the net of words. Composition is easier to describe: you can reduce it to a plot or a scheme. The "Representation Abroad" artists appeal to the theorizer in every critic because even if their color's lousy they have loads of compositional ideas. Arikha's favorite line (at least the one that is quoted the most) is, "We are all children of Mondrian." This is meant as a badge of sophistication, borne out in the recurrence in his paintings of the vertical and horizontal: Arikha likes moldings, shelves, door frames, corners. The vertical and horizontal are not, per se, Mondrianesque; they're equally Poussinesque or Vermeeresque. Mondrian's real subject, the expression of dynamic relations between forms—the weighing of shape against shape—is the exact opposite of Arikha's subdued vision. Mondrian's flatness is a principle against which he counterposes the diagonal (or sometimes even curved) paths the eye takes across the surface as it reconciles opposing forces. In Arikha's work flatness (often signified by a grid) is a means of diffusing all tension. His painting is never surprising, because all his figures and objects stay right there on the surface. The verticals and horizontals he finds in his interiors echo with the edges of the canvas and keep the viewer's eye from moving back into the space of nature. Moynihan's paintings, especially the still lifes on circular and oval canvases from the early 1980s, function in a rather similar way. Moynihan's unusual formats frame a T-shape composition: a slender shelf bearing a few objects—a bust, some tubes of paint, jars, bottles—is supported by a single vertical bar. Around this vein of conventionally rendered reality the rest of a Moynihan painting extends in all directions, a dull wasteland of washy gray. The pictures as wholes are too flat, too dimensionless to support

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what little drama takes place on the shelf. The conceit of the T-shape set against the odd-format canvas seems meant to show viewers that Moynihan isn't a fuddy-duddy realist. Like Arikha with his Mondrian talk, Moynihan has his badge of abstraction, in this case a 1960s shaped-canvas variety.

The impact of Arikha's and Moynihan's paintings is a direct result of their formulaic application of simple design principles to realist subject matter. Arikha, especially, has a knack for turning out fetching images. When he paints the back of a cello *(Noga's Cello),* the façade of an apartment house *(The Square in June),* or his own face half-obscured by a canvas, the painting may not be good, but it does have the air of a definitive statement. The satisfaction viewers feel in front of Arikha's paintings is probably little more than pride in being able to see what a neat job he has done. Arikha's paintings are always one part rendering, one part composition, one part sensibility: you can look at a section and know immediately what was a compositional choice, what was left to feeling. Arikha is in perfect control of his little batch of strategies. Since he never gets in over his head, his paintings have a look of cool, modern reserve. He wouldn't dare let go; it might mess up all those nifty arrangements.

By far the best-known artist in "Representation Abroad" is David Hockney. He's one of those Englishmen who take immediately to the American way, and Americans embrace him because he seems so much like us. Hockney is the perfect long-term guest—a world citizen who calls the American art scene home. As a foreigner who's made good in the U.S. of A., he shows other Europeans it can be done. To "Representation Abroad" he brings box-office gold.

Though Hockney went through a phase of detailed painting in the 1970s, his recent work, all bright swatches of paint and quickie Polaroid collages, at first feels very far from Arikha or Moynihan. Hockney looks like an improviser; but, like Arikha and Moynihan, he keeps a pretty tight rein on his small repertory of talents. He also has his little badges of influence, which in recent years have been Picasso after 1920 and Raoul Dufy. Hockney has been something of a pioneer in the revaluation of later Picasso and Dufy, and there's no reason to think he doesn't come by his tastes honorably. To the catalogue of Holly Solomon's Dufy show last fall he contributed some beautiful remarks: "[Dufy's] art stems from the discoveries of Cubism, and makes a link to the oriental in its visibility. Nothing is covered up, or if it is, it's still visible underneath. This helps us to see more as his brush stroke does not just tell us about the thing depicted, but his body and the difficulty of his movements because of arthritis . . . . There is a great deal in his painting that is usually missed. It is a common mistake to think that the artist who paints happy pictures is a happy person." These comments show a close, deep appreciation; it just doesn't come through in Hockney's own work. "Representation Abroad" contains three Hockney ink drawings done with a scratchy, nervous Dufyesque line; but they're so wobbly it's impossible even to think about how the borrowing has been used. Hockney is all ready to accept the School of Paris idea of letting go; if only he had something to let go of. His recent attempts to paint with scrambled facial features à la 1930s Picasso aren't variations on a theme —they're doodlings on the frayed edges of modern art.

Hockney is hardly the first artist to fancy that a distorted form is by definition an expressive shape. In the 1940s, John Graham, that valuable modern painter and polemicist, became so fed up with the cult of distortion that he declared Picasso's scrambling of human features a trick. Graham believed it was far more difficult to make a composition out of a normal head than a distorted one; he saw Picasso's transformations as acts of desperate aesthetic pragmatism. Graham's views are invariably interesting, but every attempt since Picasso to make heads à la Picasso has proven Graham wrong, for what one always feels is how

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extraordinarily difficult it must be to make a scrambled head that looks like anything at all. The magnum opus of Hockney's Cubist phase, the oil *David, Celia, Stephen, and Ian, London,* falls right into this history of failed "Picassos." With its use of three-footed, two-mouthed figures to create a sense of figures in motion, *David* . . . is really more Futurist than Cubist; and right there you have a typical case of an attempt to imitate Picasso diverted by an excess baggage of narrative content. Movement in painting is early Duchamp, not any period of Picasso. According to Lawrence Weschler, who wrote the introduction to a recent collection of Hockney's photographs, Hockney once said of the figures in *David* . . . that "They don't read as monsters." By this remark I imagine Hockney meant to set aside the traditional complaint about the monstrousness of the 1930s Picassos. The comment also suggests a deeper, perhaps unconscious wish on Hockney's part. Anyone who loves 1930s Picasso knows how many of the portraits are uncannily, dreamily beautiful. In declaring that his own figures "don't read as monsters," what Hockney may really mean to say is, "Look, I've pulled off Picasso's trick—I've made the bizarre beautiful."

The history Hockney and Weschler have spun around *David, Celia, Stephen, and Ian, London*—of Hockney's experiments with photocollage, of his attempts to break out of a "frozen" moment—has little to do with Picasso. The excitement you feel in front of the 1930s Picassos isn't the thrill of a kaleidoscope of fractured moments; you're watching an artist who can take things apart, get you thinking he's lost now, and then put it all back together in his own fashion—and keep you convinced and feeling euphoric every inch of the way. In Picasso's paintings of Dora Maar and Nusch Eluard every feature is lassoed back into a satisfying pictorial whole: the frontal eye, the profile nose, the odd ear all resolve back to the surface. With Hockney's *David* . . . there's no sense of completion, the pieces are just sketchily tossed off. In the Weschler article Hockney calls *David* . . . "unfinished." Apparently he

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sees this as his *Demoiselles d'Avignon,* an unresolvable milestone in his career. Since abandoning the picture, Hockney has used as the subject for some small, Picassoesque oils his friend Celia, whose soft, voluptuous features have a bit the quality we know from Picasso's young lover Marie-Thérèse. The odd thing about *Celia III* and *Celia with Her Foot on a Chair* is that here Hockney has given up on the feature scrambling; apparently even he knows he's not up to it. Celia's features are just a bit off kilter—and in *Celia III* she does have one of those flipper-like Picasso hands. With their few, washy strokes and big areas of bare canvas, these pictures may be Hockney's salute to the white-on-white, hardly painted manner of certain very late Picassos. (*Henry and Raymond,* in acrylic and charcoal on cardboard, recalls Picasso's use of packing materials in the 1960s.) But the Celia paintings are so half-baked they feel like an announcement of defeat. Late Picasso is probably of use only to geniuses and fools. From everything one reads about and sees by David Hockney, he's neither of the above.

Joe Shannon has included in "Representation Abroad" one photographic work: a David Hockney collage. This female *Nude, 17th June 1984,* like the other recent Hockney photocollages, is a mosaic composed of large numbers of fragmentary snapshots—a knee, a face, a bit of wall—all taken from slightly different distances and angles. Hockney has done a great deal with the male nude in painting, drawing, and photography, and though he's never been able to transform his young men into anything that could be called a convincing work of art, some of the pictures have a sort of pre-artistic appeal. When Hockney shows young men in showers or swimming pools, you know he thinks they're beautiful, and the sense of excitement and discovery comes through. The physical type in *Nude, 17th June 1984* might be a female counterpart to Hockney's male types—she has the same soft, late adolescent edge—but the treatment is something else. Viewed from above, she lies like an overturned turtle on a piece of pink satin. Her arms and legs flap helplessly around her while out of her open mouth comes the front edge of her tongue. Hockney's multi-image collages offer him a clever way of passing judgment on subjects. Sometimes it seems that if he likes someone he'll position at the center of a group of photographs of facial fragments one shot that shows the whole head from a flattering angle. The young woman in *Nude* (who is in real life the actress Theresa Russell) gets the reverse treatment; she's all cut up. Her tongue, by means of juxtaposed shots, is shown wagging like a mechanical dog's. There's nothing wrong with an artist taking a pornographic pose as a starting point—if he can extend the pose, or show us what first gave it some allure. All Hockney tells us is that this woman is a piece of cute junk.

Luciano Castelli sends out the same signals, only he does it with paint. His women, big in all the appropriate places, are dashed off in black outlines on large sheets of paper. Then Castelli slices into them with a version of De Kooning's recent, slithery brushwork. It's as if he's slapping women around with the brush: their bodies, hanging at the Hirshhorn, looked like a mess of festive, multi-colored bruises. The effect was creepy —repulsive—and made all the more so when I realized that Castelli's one male figure, the reverently painted, handsome *Torrero,* was most likely a self-portrait. Hockney's and Castelli's nudes, which hung right near the entrance to "Representation Abroad," were only the first of a series of weird twists on the figure. Antonio López-Garcia, a Spaniard who seems to have progressed from imitations of Leonardo da Vinci drawings to imitations of photographs, was represented by *Masculine and Feminine Backview,* a picture that in subject, color, and texture suggests some very bizarre scatological obsession. And Sandra Fisher, an American who lives in London, offered what Joe Shannon may see as the female response to Hockney and Castelli.

Fisher's principle work in "Representation Abroad" is *Kitaj in Jerusalem,* a portrait

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of the well-known American expatriate artist (to whom Fisher is married) lying nude on a bed bathed like some modern male Danae in the golden light of Jerusalem. Though a black cat is here to tell us we're in the country of Manet's *Olympia*, Fisher's rather laborious rendering of curly body hair recalls the surface verisimilitude against which Manet was in revolt. As a painter, Sandra Fisher simply isn't up to a male nude; and, like Sylvia Sleigh before her, she doesn't even have any interesting angle on her subjects. Fisher's idea (Sleigh's, also) is to place men in the classical poses women have been in for centuries and then declare, "This is beautiful, too." In the background of such statements are enormous, important changes in Western society and sensibility—changes in how men and women regard one another that we've all been living through, day by day. In order to absorb shifts in culture, artists must either remake tradition (Matisse) or break tradition (Picasso). In art, all experience is admissible so long as we receive it on the medium's own terms. Maybe Fisher has something to say, but she hasn't built up any trust with the viewer. She hasn't paid her dues, and we're not willing to meet her even halfway.

Joe Shannon saves Tibor Csernus, his world-champion nude painter, for the very end of "Representation Abroad," and when I came on Csernus's work it felt, at least for a moment, like a welcome relief. With their deep brown depths and bronzed highlights Csernus's paintings are unashamedly theatrical—and you can't help liking them for that. Csernus's brushwork, with its shifts in and out of focus, generates a certain excitement. There's something initially intriguing as well about his portentous, eerie light. This seems a world in which things may happen. On the occasion of Csernus's first New York show last spring, the American painter Jack Beal published an admiring, open letter to Csernus in *Arts Magazine*. Beal said that Csernus has a way of handling paint so that "sometimes the paint is paint and sometimes flesh," "sometimes the form

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is flesh and sometimes abstract element," and "sometimes the bodies are real and sometimes hallucination." The use of variations in paint-handling as a way of shifting focus is (as Beal points out) a Baroque idea. Rembrandt and Velázquez use the shifts in focus to build toward a logical, coherent whole; Csernus uses variations in paint-handling to confound our expectations. His paintings take you on an unsatisfactory, meandering journey; they're academic conundrums.

Often in "Representation Abroad" the artists' titles provide clues to their intentions. Arikha will use a title to turn a static picture into a little one-act play, such as when he calls a painting of a woman with an eye patch *Back from the Eye Clinic.* Csernus, who may be afraid that his dark brown chiaroscuro looks a bit old-fashioned, proves his modernity by titling paintings ambiguously. In "Representation Abroad" they're all called *Untitled*; but even in Beal's *Arts Magazine* article, where there are titles such as *Four Figures,* you aren't exactly given a key to the action. It's hard not to feel that Csernus's big, multi-figure pieces are called *Untitled* because he knows as little about what's going on as we do. In one painting a nude woman is doing something to another one's eye—removing a contact lens is all I can imagine; in another, a woman fiddles with a piece of string near a sleeping bag; in a third, two women play tug-of-war over a crumpled sheet. Csernus carries the banal events of seventeenth-century realism—women cutting their nails or pouring milk—into the realm of existential mumbo jumbo. The actions are random, and the more you look at them, so are the paintings. Though Csernus is one of those artists who lost their hearts to Caravaggio, the patterns of light and dark on the figures and the way the figures overlap with one another create no coherent development, no arabesques. Beal says of Csernus, "The compositions are as stable as Mondrian; the dramas as involved as Tolstoy." That's one of the craziest descriptions I've ever read; but I suppose it has a certain nice ring when applied to this artist, who's all promises, promises.

In the consideration of Caravaggio's influence on recent art too little attention has been given to the difference between the middle Caravaggio of *Amor Vincit Omnia* and the Cerasi chapel *St. Peter* and *St. Paul* and the later Caravaggio of the *Flagellation of Christ* and the *Resurrection of Lazarus.* It's in middle Caravaggio (what Walter Friedlaender calls "the monumental Roman style") that we find the revolutionary naturalist, the breaker of traditions. Late Caravaggio, with its inevitable sinking into darkness, is already on its way to becoming an institutional style. Csernus seems to want to attach himself as best he can to this later Caravaggio. The punch of middle Caravaggio—the shock of discovery—is absent in Csernus. (Balthus, who has borrowed from the composition of *Amor Vincit Omnia,* is probably the only contemporary artist who has really capitalized on middle Caravaggio.) Beal, in his letter, asks why artists today are so reluctant to look to Caravaggio in the way Ribera and Velázquez and so many others once did. He thinks Csernus is a latter-day follower of Caravaggio; but no one can really follow an artist who has been dead three hundred and fifty years. Too much has intervened.

In a review of "Representation Abroad" in *The New York Times,* Michael Brenson wondered whether one could put together a group of American representational painters comparable in interest and quality. I find the recent American artists so far superior to the Europeans that I'm surprised the question is even being asked. More intriguing to me is a different question: whether there are in this jet-travel age any significant differences in temperament between what's being done in Europe and the United States.

Here Jack Beal's Csernus letter provides some useful observations. Beal writes that "American Realists, by and large, insist upon bringing everything in their pictures to the same level of realization—to a status of equal clarity, whether painterly or sharp-focus." And he contrasts Csernus's "self-absorption" with American realists who "are

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so determinedly confrontational—our subjects either welcome or challenge the onlooker directly." American representational artists put a high value on directness and sincerity, and this connects them with one of the central visual-arts traditions in the United States. Folk art and landscape painting blossomed in nineteenth-century America because the artists had a genius for staying close to direct experience; they created less out of love for the classical-art tradition than out of a respect for materials and the way materials could mediate between human culture and the nature that lay all around. A related freedom from tradition—at least from conventional ideas of tradition—enabled some American artists of the 1930s and 1940s to respond quickly to the new anti-traditional practices of Picasso, Matisse, Mondrian, and Miró. To the Abstract Expressionists of the 1950s direct experience was the only valid kind.

The old American art ideals of directness and sincerity keep the new American painters of still life, landscape, and figure from getting too weighed down by the great high-art tradition. Americans can't claim the Old World patrimony, and this sometimes leads artists to be more European than the Europeans. But the distance from Europe (the dissociation from tradition) can force artists to resolve pictorial struggles in the realm of paint and canvas, clay and stone—not in the mind's eye. The taste of American representational artists is often miserably bad; but when these artists fall flat on their faces, it's with a good, honest American thud. The artists in "Representation Abroad" know all too well how to make a bad fall look like an expert landing. Some of these Europeans are inspired fudgers. Arikha and Csernus and Hockney and Moynihan pass off mediocre effects as class acts. And the gap between the expectations they arouse and what they really deliver leaves viewers a comfortable margin. You're not being called to a higher standard; you can enjoy the work and at the same time feel a bit superior to it.

Americans are in the clutch of a new romance with contemporary European art, but sometimes it seems we're passing time with harmless old courtiers. No wonder Balthus got such a lukewarm welcome at the Metropolitan Museum last year. He's *not* the kind of artist you can pat on the head and say, "Oh, those Europeans have such a nice old-fashioned way of doing things." What's been so mesmerizing in Balthus's work of the last twenty years is the way he's kept renewing himself within a tradition everyone around him thinks is dead. When Balthus paints, the spirits of Tuscany and Venice and Paris really walk again. At "Representation Abroad" nothing came to life. You were in the Twilight Zone.

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Music

When the critic criticized

by Samuel Lipman

Today, we are told, is an age of criticism. In painting, both friends and foes of the new tell us that what we see cannot be comprehended without our studying the critic's notion of the art. In literature, the various flavors of structuralism and deconstruction have managed to replace the text with the exegesis. Across a wide spectrum of the arts, the whole situation curiously resembles the world of what used to be called *haute cuisine*: for every mouthful of the real thing, one must eat a thousand words.

In music, however, criticism does not quite occupy this exalted position. Here, paralleling the general torpor of a commercially entrenched and artistically routinized establishment, music criticism serves as the handmaiden of a celebrity-oriented audience, at its best applying academic musicology to the rationalizing of box-office success. Where critical writing is able to escape this state of elegant lackeydom, it soon finds itself boosting the new solely for the sake of its newness—even in situations where the critic himself is clearly aware of the ephemeral and trivial nature of that which he feels compelled to praise.

It was not always so. Back in the nineteenth century, when even intellectual journalism could be yellow, music critics saw themselves as passionate advocates of their own tastes, and equally passionate scourges of that which—at least according to their lights—dirtied the holy shrine of art. Of course, there were consequences attendant on this extravagant willingness to praise and damn: for every friend a critic made there inevitably arose two enemies looking to get even. But there was another, more important, consequence. When one looks back a century ago at musical journalism in Berlin, Vienna, Paris, and London (or even New York and Boston), one finds polemics, controversy, anger—in short, vitality. It is hardly necessary to add that in criticism, as in art, vitality excuses nearly every sin.

A book published last year in England, and now available in this country, makes clear just how interesting and alive this music criticism was. Charles Reid's *The Music Monster*[1] is a biography of James William Davison (1813-1885), the impulsive and outspoken music critic of *The Times* of London from 1846 to 1878. Mr. Reid is the author of biographies of several notable English conductors, among them Sir Thomas Beecham (1961), Sir Malcolm Sargent (1968), and Sir John Barbirolli (1971). He has also served as a music critic for several English publications, including the *Observer,* the *News Chronicle,* the *Spectator,* and *Punch.* So that the reader might form an idea of Davison as expressed in his own words, Mr. Reid has appended to his biographical material some amusing and effective, though tendentiously chosen, examples of Davison's critical writings.

1 *The Music Monster,* by Charles Reid; Quartet Books, 243 pages, $17.95.

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Like every other critic, Davison of *The Times* did not write in a void. During the years of his journalistic career, Romantic music was flourishing in Germany, Austria, and France. It was the time of Mendelssohn, Schumann, and Brahms, of Liszt and Wagner, and of Chopin and Berlioz. The past, that bugbear of our own musical life, was already a potent factor in contemporary taste; the recently dead Beethoven and Schubert, no less than the somewhat more distant Mozart and J. S. Bach, were already casting their long shadows across the decades. Among the living greats, there were major conflicts of personality and aesthetics. Early in Davison's reign the disciples of Mendelssohn and Schumann, and later the followers of Wagner and Brahms, were busy carving up the musical landscape in the names of their masters. And in the world of opera, the new winds associated with Wagner and Verdi were chasing out the musty remains of Donizetti and Meyerbeer.

Across the channel, England was still little more than a customer—the best one, to be sure—for the finest products of European composition and performance. Since Handel there had been no incontestably great composer resident and composing in England; since Purcell some hundred and fifty years earlier, no native-born composer had achieved European stature. In performance, though there were some exceptions among singers, Continental primacy seemed assured. All in all, it was as compradore auditors, impresarios, and performers that the English found their place in the world of music.

This was the situation in which Davison made his mark as a happy warrior of the pen. According to no less imposing an authority than the encyclopedist Sir George Grove, Davison "composed a great deal for orchestra, piano, and the voice, and will be remembered by some elegant and thoughtful settings of poetry by Keats, Shelley, and others." Even according to the account of the vastly less sympathetic Charles Reid, Davison was able to play the piano, read scores, and instantly identify known and little-known repertory. He was the major musical influence on Arabella Goddard, perhaps the first English pianist to make an international reputation, and became her husband in 1859. At his suggestion she brought the Beethoven Sonatas opp. 101, 109, 110, and 111 to the attention of the English public for the first time.

Davison was a prolific writer for publications other than *The Times*. He was the editor of the *Musical World* from 1844 until his death and was also a longtime contributor to the *Saturday Review* and the *Pall Mall Gazette*. He wrote program notes for many important London concerts, producing analyses (again in Grove's words) "in support of the best and most classical taste." For Grove, Davison was a man of "keen wit and grotesque humour—often Rabelaisian enough . . . [and he was] very much of a Bohemian."

Not surprisingly, it was at *The Times*—"The Thunderer" of English newspaper history—that Davison exercised his greatest power. Like Davison, *The Times* took its duties to its readers seriously, even in music. This attitude was made explicit in a letter written to Davison by the paper's Manager, Mowbray Morris, and quoted in the second volume of the magisterial *History of The Times:* "It is in our power," Morris wrote, "to do a great deal by way of giving the public a good musical taste, & our immense circulation, independent of any confidence that people may have in our judgment, entails upon us a very serious responsibility."

For Davison, this responsibility meant upholding the music of his youth against the encroachments of the full-blown Romanticism which, though he could hardly have known it, would find fulfillment at the end of the century and beyond in Strauss and Mahler, and even in Schoenberg. Davison's tastes were pre-eminently classical. Mr. Reid, though he does not give any examples, says that Davison "wrote of Handel, Mozart and Beethoven with veneration." Doubtless the late Beethoven sonatas, supreme examples of early Romanticism though they may be, were acceptable to Davison because Beethoven encapsulated their tumultuous emotions

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in a solid case of sonata form, fugue, and variation writing.

When Davison came to the music of Schubert, he made it clear that charm, melody, invention, and romance were in his eyes no substitute for the mastery of musical architecture:

> . . . Schubert, in some symphonies, overtures, quartets, etc., has evinced a great desire to excel in the sonata form; but he was not entirely successful. He either disdained or failed to understand thoroughly the indispensable elements of that form—clearance, consistency and symmetrical arrangement of themes, keys and episodes. Schubert, though gifted with an abundant flow of ideas, was greatly wanting in the power of concentration and arrangement. He accepted all that came to him and rejected nothing. Thus, while he is never insipid and almost always interesting, he is diffuse, obscure and exaggerated.

In discussing Schubert's C major Symphony, Davison returned to the same point:

> One important failing, it must be admitted, characterizes all Schubert's instrumental works; this is the evidence of the want of the constructive power which is the one particular quality to give value to the creative faculty. The richness of invention displayed in the symphony before us is [as] profuse as the capacity for order and arrangement is deficient; ideas crowd on one another with never-ending facility, but their purposeless repetition annuls the effect of their beauty and wearies the attention as much as their number and variety exhaust it.

In the case of Chopin, Davison oscillated between forthright criticism and cautious praise. Mr. Reid goes so far as to describe the praise as a "fib" done at a publisher's behest. In reviewing some newly published mazurkas, Davison puts his cards on the table:

> The greatest art in musical composition is that which is deployed in developing or prolonging any thought that may arrive—the thought may be the result of natural ability, but the facility of using it happily—of making it give character to an extended work—or working out of it all of which it is capable—of causing it to be not only the original feature but the prevailing sentiment—this considerable faculty belongs only to the *practised* as well as gifted composer; and this faculty is utterly unexhibited by Chopin—indeed, the works of this author invariably give us the idea of an enthusiastic schoolboy whose parts are by no means on a par with his enthusiasm, who *will* be original, whether he *can* or not.

It was Mendelssohn, the musical incarnation of Victorian morality, sweetness of nature, and restraint of passion, who was for Davison the ideal of a living composer. Though Mr. Reid does mention that in 1847 Davison wrote for both the *Musical World* and *The Times* a "number-by-number analysis" of and "paean" to *Elijah,* he fails to give us any example of the formal discussion lavished on the work. But Davison's estimation of Mendelssohn, which Mr. Reid does quote, suffices to give the critic's true feelings:

> Let me state my firm conviction . . . that Mendelssohn is nothing inferior to any of the most distinguished men that have influenced the progress of the [musical] art and that his name, placed by the side of Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven—the hitherto Unapproachable Five—will shine as bright and endure as long as any of them.

In the light of this praise, one can well feel the force of Davison's reaction to news of his beloved composer's death. As recounted by a French fellow music critic, the emotions ran hot:

> Suddenly his looks, drawn as it were by some magnetic influence to a journal that lay half-open on the table, read these terrible words:
>
> FELIX MENDELSSOHN-BARTHOLDY IS DEAD
>
> It is impossible to describe the cry of agony that escaped him. He rose—and fell imme-

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diately. His eyes were filled with tears, his face was ashen pale, his lips trembled, and during three hours he was attacked by successive convulsive fits, broken only by heartrending sobs and unconnected phrases, until he was brought to the verge of delirium and fever. Would that I could recount to you with the same familiar ease, the same impetuosity, all the charming traits, all the noble actions, all those details so touching and simple in the life of Mendelssohn such as I heard them one by one from the lips of my distracted friend.

If, for Davison, Mendelssohn meant perfection of spirit and intellect, Robert Schumann represented the opposite. In 1853, again in the *Musical World* (from which, curiously, most of the examples Mr. Reid gives of Davison's writings are taken, rather than from *The Times*), Davison's rejection of Schumann on formal grounds reached totality:

> . . . we regret to say, bad as we consider the chamber compositions of this author, we are forced to pronounce the present orchestral work [the *Overture, Scherzo, and Finale*] still worse. Throughout the three movements, so unusually designated, we failed to recognize one musical idea. The *Overture* is the weak first movement of a symphony; the movement in C sharp a weaker *Scherzo,* and the last movement a weak *Finale.* The general style betrays the patchiness and want of fluency of a tyro; while the forced and unnatural turns of cadence and progression disclose neither more nor less than the convulsive efforts of one who has never properly studied his art to hide the deficiencies of early education under a mist of pompous swagger. The whole work is unworthy of analysis, since it has no merit whatsoever . . . .

For Franz Liszt, too, Davison had nothing but contempt. Here the attack was not strictly musical. Davison seemed to see Liszt as a betrayer of the desire for salvation and the Godhead:

> Turn your eyes, reader, to any one composition that bears the name of Liszt if you are

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unlucky to have such a thing on your pianoforte and answer frankly, when you have examined it, if it contains one bar of genuine music. Composition indeed!—decomposition is the proper word for such hateful *fungi* which choke up and poison the fertile plains of harmony, threatening the world with drowth —the world that pants for "the music which is divine" and can only slake its burning thirst at the "silver fountains" of genuine, flowing melody—*melody,* yes, melody, *absolute* melody.

Over many years, Davison linked Liszt with Wagner as what can only be called twin representatives of the Antichrist. Perhaps no other words of Davison in this book go so far as these to demonstrate the exalted theological role the artist occupied in the middle of the nineteenth century, and the extent to which that role could be seen as sacrilegious rather than sacrosanct:

Liszt has been ordered to Zurich by his master, Richard Wagner. The *Nibelungen* [sic] is rapidly progressing, and the unhappy pianoking (who has recently been perpetuating some orchestral symphonies and a festival Mass, in humble emulation of the Zukunft) is obliged to be present at the parturition. Where are the other wise men?

Davison was hardly as unambivalent in his attitude to Wagner as he was to Liszt. Early Wagner—the operas written before the *Ring,* (1853-1874), *Tristan und Isolde* (1859), *Die Meistersinger* (1867), and *Parsifal* (1882) —was anathema to Davison. *Tannhäuser* (1845) was a particular devil for him, as he made clear in an 1854 review of the passage known as "The Entrance of the Guests into the Wartburg":

As, according to some transcendentalists it is the mission of Richard Wagner to announce to the world "the music of the future," he merits attention. But for that we should have dismissed the present composition with a line, which is as much as it is really worth. A more commonplace, lumbering and awkward thing of its kind we never perused . . . .

Towards the end this puerile, Frenchified, patchy tune is resumed with all the pomp and stridency of the Wagnerian full orchestra (by which we mean one much noisier and much thinner than the legitimate full orchestra). The rest of the march is quite worthy of the above; and, at the end, the violins are screaming up to B flat in *alt* . . . as is Mr. Wagner's frequent and disagreeable custom. *There* is a "future" for you, O musicians!

Davison kept up his hostile position toward Wagner well into the preparations for the first complete performance of the *Ring* in Bayreuth in 1876. But in the summer of that year, actually on the scene as "Our Special Correspondent" for *The Times,* he began to change his mind. He still had his reservations, mainly because of what he saw as the inability of Wagner's music to possess meaning apart from the action on the stage. Now, however, for the first time Davison shows himself capable of praise for the composer's achievement:

. . . in the course of a single scene, more than one personage, incident or emotion is brought back to the mind, at times almost simultaneously; the themes, or such fragments of them as may be suitable, are ingeniously interwoven. This is accomplished by the poet-musician with consummate artistic propriety and often produces an indescribably beautiful effect.

The funeral march that accompanies the body of Siegfried is . . . impressive and sublime. The melody sung by the Rhinemaidens . . . in seven-bar rhythm is charming; and, indeed, all the music that characterizes the presence of these charming beings is as airy and elementary as themselves . . . .

Still, unlike other converts to Wagnerism, Davison retained enough distance from the wonders onstage to be able to characterize the artistic phenomenon with a sure touch:

In his anxious desire to exhibit the musician as the poet's humble slave, Wagner not only prevents him from soaring to the highest

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> regions of fancy but, by crushing the buds of melody as they spring up, buds that might blossom into seemly flowers, cramps the manifold resources of expression which are the golden heritage of art. True, the serene archdramatist in the *Ring des Nibelungen,* with becoming self-abnegation, practises this to his own detriment, for he, too, possesses abundant melody, if not Orphean, like Mozart's, or coming directly from the innermost sources of his being, like the endless melody of Beethoven, is at least sufficiently frank, independent and alluring not to submit gracefully to the treatment it receives at his hands. Wagner allows his melody to awaken expectation by an opening phrase but seldom or never rounds off and finishes that phrase so as at once to delight and satisfy the ear. His principal charm, in fact, is the unexampled, almost magical colouring of the orchestra, which keeps us enthralled and spellbound to the last—though speculating rather than understanding, disposed to marvel rather than to sympathize.

Strangely, though Davison enthusiastically welcomed Wagner's London appearances in the spring of 1877 at the Royal Albert Hall, he nevertheless published at the same time—albeit under a pseudonym—skeptical excerpts from his diary written during the Bayreuth performances the preceding summer. The impression given by these random jottings was that of a bemused spectator of a zoo containing marvels of wonder, if not of beauty. Davison's final words on Wagner, at least as far as the present book is concerned—taken from a letter written after his retirement from *The Times* and just two years before his death—return to his earlier positions:

> The music of *Parsifal* is simply execrable. I have entirely changed my opinion about the book. Gurnemanz is an absolute bore and Parsifal an insipid donkey—not the Parsifal of genuine romance. Kundry alone redeems the thing from hopeless inanity.

Davison's harsh words about contemporary opera were not confined to Wagner. Indeed, Davison's words about Verdi's *Rigoletto* on the occasion of its first London performance in 1853 have gone down in the history of music criticism as a colossal error of prediction:

> There is little offensive music in *Rigoletto*; the ears are seldomer stunned than in most of the composer's other works, and there is, we fancy, little pretence in the writing. Nevertheless, Verdi's sins are apparent in every scene. Poverty of ideas, an eternal effort at originality—never accomplished—strange and odd phrases, lack of colouring, and a perpetual swagger in the dramatic effects, are unmistakably true Verdi . . . . With all that has been accomplished for *Rigoletto* by the directors of the Royal Italian Opera, it cannot live. It may flicker and flare up for a few nights . . . but it will go out like an ill-wicked rushlight and leave not a spark behind. Such is our prophecy for *Rigoletto*!

Never one to let consistency hobble his writing, Davison went on to express favorable thoughts about Verdi's pot-boiling *Hymn of the Nations,* a stringing together of assorted anthems from England, France, and Italy. And the old curmudgeon even found some good words to say for Verdi when *Aida* was performed for the first time in London in 1876: "He is still, happily, the Verdi of our long remembrance, our own Verdi, and may he continue to remain so."

Throughout *The Music Monster* it is clear that Mr. Reid is out of sympathy with Davison's musical judgments; the critic's unmitigated rejection of *Rigoletto* especially excites his scorn. But the book is an indictment of Davison in other ways as well. Mr. Reid accuses him of taking bribes from musicians in return for favorable treatment. Sometimes the bribes Mr. Reid has in mind are no more than dinners and trinkets; in two other instances Mr. Reid provides examples in which Davison was offered cash by composers. The cash, it seems, was quickly returned. Mr. Reid makes rather more of the trinkets:

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> As to the "presents" that came Davison's way there is a revelatory passage in *The Times* official history. This tells us that Francis Hueffer, who ultimately succeeded him as *The Times* music critic, had to engage a four-wheeler [cab] to carry back to musicians the presents which, in accordance with previous practice, were brought to his door. It adds that under Hueffer the suggestion of corruption to which Davison had laid himself open entirely ceased.

Unfortunately, Mr. Reid neglects to inform his readers that his paraphrase from *The History of The Times* might have read differently had he taken into account the characterization which prefaces the anecdote: "It may not be true, as Mrs. Hueffer is reported to have said." It might be added, too, that the phrase "in accordance with previous practice" does not appear in any form in *The History of The Times.*

Whatever the exact state of Davison's journalistic ethics, it seems difficult to convict him of behavior very much outside the norm of the critics of his day. Doubtless the practices of our own times are more subtle; cash bribes and expensive presents may well be a thing of the past in music criticism. But surely there are less *éclatant* ways in which critics' opinions are influenced in favor of composers and performing institutions. We apply to these ways the honorific names of trips, papers, seminars, and conferences. It all goes not under the dirty flag of corruption, but under the banner of creating a favorable atmosphere in which art may be done. The present methods of stroking the critic cannot be called bribery because the critic is free to write against even his most gracious hosts. But when he does write negatively in the face of the hospitality he has received, he opens himself to the charge of biting the hand that feeds him; when in all good faith he writes well of occasions on which he has been entertained, his writings lack credence with a musical public that has its own good reasons for cynicism.

The gravamen of Mr. Reid's charge against Davison, however, is not moral; it is intellectual. It is that Davison was dreadfully wrong about the music he heard. Mr. Reid is quite clear about the reason for such a serious accusation:

> My opening sentence spoke of Davison as a musical monster. There were, I must allow, redeeming glints, the brightest being his adoration of Mendelssohn . . . . But a critic is to be judged by his response to the music of his own day. Davison grew up and lived to the end in parallel with the efflorescence of Romantic music, one of the most startling and joyous chapters in the history of mankind. His hatreds and deridings of the Romantic masters were equally startling but a lamentable inversion of all that is joyous.

It seems to me that two charges, not one, are contained here. The more obvious one, of course, is that Davison heard greatness and denied its stature. Schubert, Schumann, Chopin, Verdi: these were giants of Davison's musical experience, and to one degree or another, by hearing so little of the beauty in them, he rejected them all. Davison thus becomes the opposite of the critic of modern myth who successfully picks the artistic giants of tomorrow. Instead of identifying winners, Davison found fault with everything.

But there surely is more to being a critic than making winning selections. A critic must describe the music he hears, in a way which catches its essential nature. When we read today what Davison wrote about many years ago on its appearance, we cannot help but notice how often he got salient musical features right even when he missed what was beautiful—and got them right in a way which still seems to shed light. His comments, for example, about Schubert's lack of comfort in working with sonata form strike home to any pianist who has spent years working on even the best of the composer's sonatas. Similarly, Davison's animadversions on Chopin's shortcomings in "developing or prolonging any thought that may arrive" will appear with particular force to anyone who has seriously listened to the wanderings

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of the central section of the first movement of the Polish composer's otherwise very beautiful B minor Piano Sonata. The structural weaknesses in all too many of Schumann's works are so widely known as not to require mention; significantly, it has proven difficult if not impossible until the present day to perform his symphonies without altering, often radically, their orchestration.

Davison's remarks about Liszt's "hateful *fungi* which choke up and poison the fertile plains of harmony" catch something of the composer's restless and even morbid chromaticism. They also seem to go even further, and suggest Davison's recognition of, and antipathy to, Liszt's vision (shared with Wagner) of the unity of love and death. In this regard, it is relevant to cite the lines of the poet Uhland—from the poem "Seliger Tod" ("Blessed Death")—which Liszt used for the second of his three *Liebesträume* (1850), originally written as songs and then later as piano pieces:

Gestorben war ich	(I had died
Vor Liebeswonn,	Of love-rapture
Begarben lag ich	I lay buried
In ihren Armen;	In her arms;
Erwecket ward ich	I was awakened
Von ihren Küssen,	By her kisses,
Den Himmel sah ich	Heaven I saw
In ihren Augen.	In her eyes.)

As for Wagner, certainly it can be said that, for all its merits, *Tannhäuser* is not a transcendent work, that it still carries with it much baggage of the composer's fustian youth. There can be no doubt at all that, were it not for Wagner's works subsequent to it (and *Lohengrin,* 1848), we would view it as an interesting work by a minor composer. Davison's description of the *Ring* at Bayreuth in 1876 fully deserves *The Times* history's tribute:

> . . . despite his mistrust of everything associated with the name of Wagner, he wrote a series of accounts which are masterly on the informative side. Indeed, that dated August 20, which sums up the impressions of a first hearing of *The Ring,* is something more. It contains much just and intelligent criticism which could only have been made by one who had studied the scores and listened attentively to the performances.

Perhaps nowhere else is *The Times* history's verdict—"On the whole it may be said of Davison that he began a tendency in the paper's music criticism, noticeable ever since, to swim against the tide of popular favour"—more clearly exemplified than in this "monster's" judgment of the early works of Verdi. It goes without saying that they were, are, and doubtless will be, enormous popular successes; it is also plain that their greatness lies in their appeal to a common (in the sense of widespread and shared) taste. As with Wagner's earlier operas, today we do not judge *Rigoletto* through mid-nineteenth-century ears. Instead we judge all of Verdi on the basis of our knowledge of the incomparably more elevated and greater *Otello* and *Falstaff,* which Verdi wrote approximately forty years after *Rigoletto.*

So the charge against Davison is not that he *mistook* the works of these masters; it is rather that he didn't *like* them. This charge merges almost indistinguishably into another, and more serious, accusation. It is that Davison preferred the old to the new, and in so doing defaulted on the responsibility of the critic to the present and the future.

Here is a charge to strike fear into the heart of every critic who cares for the good opinion of his peers, and who, in the words of Macbeth, has ". . . bought/Golden opinions from all sorts of people,/Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,/Not cast aside so soon." Unfortunately, a critic who capitulates in the face of pressure to be upbeat about the new on principle becomes little more than a mirror image of the critic who, again on principle, always chooses the old. Both critics—the lover of the new and the lover of the old—treat their own tastes as arbitrary extensions of will, as if to like a particular kind of art one only had to want to do so badly enough. To say of Davison that he should have liked the new music he

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heard, the music that was taking Europe by storm, is to ask that he should have made his musical decisions arbitrarily rather than on the basis of his talents, his training, and his preferences. Had he done so, he would have been both less accurate as a critic and vastly less interesting to read.

We are always being told that the new, in order to survive, must be boosted. Malign consequences are everywhere seen to result from lack of critical encouragement, and whole books—most notably Nicolas Slonimsky's *Lexicon of Musical Invective* (1953)—have been devoted to documenting critical rejections of what later turned out to be great composers and their music. Mr. Reid himself makes an absurd claim for Davison's long-term influence on the taste of the musical public:

> In Davison's day readers of *The Times* and the *Musical World* went to those prints as founts of truth and good sense. Nor was his spell confined to his own day. It long survived him. Until middle age I myself spurned Chopin. From Chopin recitals I stayed away, explaining to Chopinite friends that I did not wish to be smothered with scented cushions. In the case of Liszt, sedulously remembered as a "womanizer" and nothing else, I substituted for "scented cushions" the phrase "scented pillow slips." Both gibes were reflections of Davison animosities which, dutifully cultivated and spread, continued to hold sway during much of the following century.

From Mr. Reid's words one could form no idea that composers most reviled by Davison were, and are, the great staples of the musical repertory, or that our problems in finding a viable new music stem not from the rejection of greatness but from its very triumph. More important—at least in evaluating Mr. Reid himself as a critic—is the curious phenomenon of a writer on music being so easily beguiled, not by music, but by words written about music.

Just because we do seem to lack both successful new music and a fresh stock of old masterpieces, it could be said that most of what we have in music today *is* words—measured words, scholarly words, judicious words, and, above all, printed words. What all these words about music add up to can be seen from even a cursory perusal of the pages of the *Gramophone,* England's grand old auntie of a record review magazine. Here, in balanced tributes to old composers from Albinoni to Zandonai, twentieth-century composers from Malcolm Arnold to Bernd Alois Zimmermann, and performers from Ashkenazy to Zukerman, one can catch a sufficient whiff of the boredom from which music criticism suffers today: nothing is the greatest, nothing is the worst, but everything is heartwarming and hopeful. Faced with all this good feeling, a mere music lover might be pardoned for preferring that old music monster, J.W. Davison.

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Books

A vanishing metaphor

by Vernon Young

In a paragraph memorable to anyone who has read and re-read E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India,* Cecil Fielding, a British schoolmaster, on his way home to England after many years, pauses in Venice. There confronted with the visible coherence of Europe, he is driven, not without "a sense of disloyalty," to compare it with the visible formlessness of the country he has left.

> The buildings of Venice, like the mountains of Crete and the fields of Egypt, stood in the right place, whereas in poor India everything was placed wrong . . . . In the old undergraduate days he had wrapped himself up in the many-coloured blanket of St. Mark's, but something more precious than mosaics and marbles was offered to him now: the harmony between the works of man and the earth that upholds them, the civilization that has escaped muddle, the spirit in a reasonable form, with flesh and blood subsisting . . . . [T]hough Venice was not Europe, it was part of the Mediterranean harmony. The Mediterranean is the human norm. When men leave that exquisite lake, whether through the Bosphorus or the Pillars of Hercules, they approach the monstrous and extraordinary; and the southern exit leads to the strangest experience of all.

Sixty years later, the "exquisite lake" is polluted from one end to the other; the monstrous and the extraordinary can be experienced without leaving the borders of the Mediterranean; harmony between the works of man and the earth that upholds them is as faintly visible on the Mediterranean as it is anywhere; and if the spirit in a reasonable form is evident anywhere in Western Europe (outside the buildings and paintings), Italy will be the last country where you can expect to find it.

In his new book, *On the Shores of the Mediterranean,*[1] Eric Newby may not have set out to demonstrate how drastically Fielding's vision has been devaluated in our implacably eroding century, but among other things that is what he has unmistakably done in this fairly abrasive scrutiny of the countries he has chosen to visit (or to revisit). Newby is the least dilettantish of travel writers. His journeys have usually been done the hard way—as an apprentice on a foremaster in *The Last Grain Race,* on foot and sky-high in *A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush.* Other considerations aside, his personal memories of the Mediterranean were bound to be of a grimmer cast than those of E. M. Forster. Newby's Mediterranean was a crucial battleground in World War II, where, as an officer in the British Army, he took part in the desperate defense of Tobruk, in Libya, against Field Marshal Rommel. Forty years later, "Tobruk, with its shuttered shops and dusty streets full of garbage . . . was still the noisy, unlovely place it has always been, the only real differ-

1 *On the Shores of the Mediterranean* by Eric Newby; Little, Brown, 448 pages, $19.95.

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ence being that now there was more of it." His verdict on many of the fifteen countries he treats in this book is comparable. Either they have remained dismally unchanged or they have changed for the worse.

Of course, it is arguable whether, as late as 1924, the Mediterranean could have been described by anyone as exhibiting the human norm, but we know what Fielding (or E. M. Forster, if you like) meant by his Eurocentric preference. From the eastern Mediterranean we inherited the doctrines of Athenian Greece and of Roman Christianity, together with less prominent influences from Islam and Byzantium; if this was an incompatible mix, it was nonetheless the crucible in which were shaped our arts, our laws, and our sciences before they took on the confounding dimensions of the Renaissance.

To judge by Newby's book, the comparatively few decades which have passed since Fielding stated his ideal conception have seen an alarming speed-up of the disharmony between the works of man and his conduct. I don't want to sound more portentous than Newby's narrative justifies. Newby himself is not given to reflective brooding over decline and fall; he is a first-rate observer with an unsteady conception of how much historical background he should provide. But his observations of the contemporary scene do lead us to the depressing conviction that the human norm represented by Mediterranean countries today can't be what Fielding had in mind.

"The buildings of Venice . . . stood in the right place." Read this literally and a queasy sensation will ensue. For how long will they stand in the right place? If you have ever lingered in Venice through the marvelous early days of October—"going home" at night in a *vaporetto* after a day spent in the automotive alienation of noisy Padua—you may forget, for a hushed hour, the commonly held opinion that Venice is sinking. Yet Venice was always sinking! Like a mortal, its death was built in with its conception. In pre-industrial centuries, as now, the determining conditions for the flood that one day will not subside at the crucial hour—the so-called *acqua alta*—are heavy rain, a full moon, falling barometric pressure, and a strong sirocco, all of which prevent the water in the lagoon from getting out. As far back as 1240 the water rose to the height of a man; in 1280, rising from 8 a.m. until noon, it drowned hundreds in their houses, and as many perished of the cold. In modern times such calamities have increased with serious frequency. During our century the city has been inundated no less than forty times and the accompanying effects have been the more destructive, Newby reminds us, because to the normal waste products in this city without drains have been added the poisonous effluents of industry: "dangerous quantities of ammonia and its by-products of oxidation, phenol, cyanide, sulphur, chlorine, naphtha, as well as oil from passing ships."

The most spectacular instance to date of the fatally impending deluge was the *acqua alta* of November 4, 1966, when waves twelve feet high smashed the bathing facilities on the Lido, and at Venice itself the water rose six and a half feet above the normal sea level. According to Newby's recital of the consequence, which is supported by his passion for the numerical, the flood threatened four hundred and fifty bridges, submerged the one hundred and twenty shoals or islands on which the city is allegedly built, and inundated fifteen thousand houses in which people lived on the ground floor. Three thousand miles of streets and alleys and the various open spaces known as *campi* were also inundated "with an unimaginably vile compound of all the various effluents mentioned previously . . . . To which was added diesel oil and gas oil which had escaped from the storage tanks, leaving the city without electric light, means of cooking or heating, or any communication with the outside world."

One of my recurring nightmares is what will happen if the waters of the Venice lagoon neap sufficiently to engulf the Scuola di San Rocco, in which are housed under

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one roof more masterpieces by a single painter (Tintoretto) than anywhere else in Europe. Such considerations seem not to have inspired any major effort of prevention or rehabilitation (whatever these might be) on the part of the Italian government. Imbued by the spirit of classical timelessness, perhaps, civic officials do nothing in Italy until a crisis makes unopposable demands. It was always predictable that the Arno would overflow at Florence and inundate the basement archives of the Uffizi. This is what happened—in the late Sixties, if I recall correctly—and innumerable manuscripts and facsimiles were either destroyed or irretrievably damaged. Newby doesn't mention that in the Seventies a small fortune was donated to the city of Venice by an international committee for purposes of salvage. When, a few years later, the authorities were consulted on the progress being made, the fortune had mysteriously disappeared.

Newby's last word for the situation is *spooky*: the fateful alliance of indifferent nature with procrastinating man. The waters of our oceans are constantly rising because of the melting of polar ice; in the Venetian case the city is sinking because the subsoil has been deprived of alluvium by the re-routing of rivers. "So that one day, quite suddenly, without warning, just as the Campanile collapsed [July 14, 1902], so too will the wooden piles that support the buildings of the city, of which there are said to be more than a million beneath Santa Maria della Salute alone, suddenly give up supporting them and allow the city to disappear forever."

Death in Venice. I have long thought Thomas Mann's title appropriate to the sunset ambience invoked by almost everyone (E. M. Forster excluded) who has written an elegiac word on the sinking city. Death is in fact a conception more profoundly associated with Italy than the popular attribution of vitality—yet vitality, of a sometimes macabre order, is by no means absent.

See Naples and die. There seems to be a good chance that you will, if Newby's recital is taken to heart. Here is a city where violent crime has been accepted, not helplessly but with bracing eagerness, as the flourishing norm of the community, and all the strategies of public life are dedicated to it. A kind of internecine war is the rule. Rival criminal organizations and two special-operation groups of the Carabinieri seem to make up, in essential outline, the Neapolitan populace. The criminal rivals are the Nuovo Camorra Organization and the Nuovo Famiglia. (That in Italy a criminal syndicate should call itself the New Family is altogether characteristic.) "This battle . . . taking place under our eyes," Newby assures us, as of 1983, "was for the ultimate control of almost everything criminal: robbery, kidnapping, intimidation of shopkeepers, all sorts of smuggling including drugs, male and female prostitution and illegal property development not only in Naples and the offshore islands of Ischia and Capri but in the whole of Italy from Apulia and Calabria in the deep south as far north as Milan": an embrace that should silence anyone who had it on the tip of his tongue to protest that Naples is not Italy!

How a citizenry survives corruption and decimation to the extent reported by Newby is hard to understand but in Naples survive it does, in an atmosphere of resonant melodrama, with spoils galore for the conquering group. What we take for granted as urban amenities simply don't exist in vast areas of this fantastic city. Most remarkable for its outlaw status is the area known as Il Triangolo della Morte, composed of three districts subdivided into municipalities *(comuni)*: "Inside Il Triangolo . . . live more than half a million people, a large proportion of whom are unemployed and without any apparent hope of finding employment. Everything within Il Triangolo is inadequate: schools, water supply, housing and recreational facilities." In Caivano-Fratta, one of Il Triangolo's three districts, five of the eight *comuni* have not a single police or Carabinieri post. Hence it is not surprising that Il Triangolo is a prominent battlefield for the warring clans: "there were fifty murders there in the first eight months of

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1983." One thing I find puzzling: that in such a situation statistics are available and, by Newby at least, accepted without question.

All the same, a peripheral society endures, shaken but unbowed, or perhaps just unheard from. Seen as a single collateral image, Naples is like one of those genre paintings in which figures of a primary color are placed in centered position at the frontal plane of the canvas and subordinate elements, while differentiated and visible, shade off into the middle distance and the margins. In Newby's account a rich mélange of occupations and beliefs finds expression in this otherwise static composition. He describes "a long, long street with eight different names . . . . an astonishing, fascinating street full of medieval, renaissance, baroque and rococo churches, palaces and monuments; bookshops; repairers and vendors of second-hand dolls; and with long, narrow dangerous alleys running uphill from it in an area infested with robbers, one of which is full of makers and sellers of *presepi* (cribs) and the painted terracotta figures of the infant Christ, the Virgin, the Shepherds and the Kings and the animals which every Neapolitan family brings out in Christmas week." Life, with undying emblems of the faith, goes on, in the teeth of our logical inferences that it cannot.

No Italophile I know would dream of living in Naples and I wouldn't go there for a day. Yet, since all values are nourished by alternative choice, one way of appreciating the energetic, if nefarious, *mise-en-scène* is to compare it with its virtual opposite: that of Albania. Newby's account of this supremely dreadful country is especially welcome; so few writers visit the place, often being forbidden to go there either by Albania itself or by their own governments (ours, for instance: the United States broke off relations in 1946 and vetoed Albania's admission to the United Nations). When Newby was there in 1983, no Rusians, no Yugoslavs, and, for the moment, no Chinese were admitted: "nobody with 'writer' or 'journalist' inscribed on his or her passport, no males with long hair or beards, unless 'with a large shaven area between sideboards and start of beard'. . . . No mini-skirts, maxis, flared trousers, no bright colours . . . . No Bibles . . . . No Korans." (And Newby astutely noted that in ten days there he saw only six dogs and no cats!) As there are no privately owned cars, group travel, it goes without saying, is the only form permitted. From Newby's testimony it is evident that, as in East Germany, the border officials and the delegated guides are incomprehensibly hostile. All visitors are judged to be guilty (of *something*).

It is tempting to deduce that an invariable style of encounter follows the national adoption of Marxism-Leninism. Having been in three Communist countries, I find the deduction too hasty, for in each of the three I visited the determining tone was set by the native disposition rather than by the political program. But when a country is as ironclad as Albania it must be next to impossible to distinguish a citizen at large from the man with the holster. Newby doesn't seem to know what enforces the totally puritan vigilance in Albania. I suspect that lingering traces of the Islamic heritage, rendered fanatical by resentment of the previous regime's defection, may be responsible.

When Albania was invaded by Italy (April, 1939), King Zog (originally Achmed Zogu, son of a Muslim tribal chief) fled the country with ten chests said to contain the entire Albanian gold reserve, together with his Hungarian queen and twelve bodyguards who, the rumor goes, were eventually discharged for having made substantial inroads on the treasure they were guarding. Zog kept travelling, one step ahead of the Nazis: Greece, Turkey, Rumania, Poland, Sweden, France, and England. Newby actually met him, in Alexandria in 1963, "apparently poised for further travel . . . but without any immediate hope of returning to his native land, and in fact he never did." For during World War II the Left in Albania, "having successfully liquidated the Center and Right with the unacknowledged and perhaps unintentional aid of the Allies, founded a Na-

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tional Independence Front." By means not given in detail by Newby—but we've been there before, haven't we?—the National Independence Front was converted by war's end into a single-party dictatorship.

Henceforth, Albania was even more remote than before—from the West, at any rate. From its Communist cousins it was not so remote as to be unprofitable. The history of its changing, paranoid relations with Russia, Yugoslavia, and China is dizzying and utterly unscrupulous, the general pattern being the acceptance of huge sums of money and technical aid in the form of manpower, which is then never returned or reciprocated because the Albanian Party has introduced a political resentment at the strategic hour. With a species of economic enterprise (and pure luck) the regime has maintained its frugal independence. By 1981, Albania was the world's second largest exporter of chrome and had a sufficient surplus of hydroelectric power to acquire Yugoslavia as its customer.

Officially godless since 1967, Albania, like Russia, has a Museum of Atheism that features then-and-now maps. Before the abolition of religion, seventy-three percent of the population was Muslim (the remainder Orthodox or Roman Catholic). With his abiding affection for numbers, Newby maintains that there were, in 1938, 144 mosques and churches, 48 schools, and one hospital. In 1973, there were 371 hospitals and clinics, 307 schools, and no mosques or churches. And no more cakes and ale. After 1967 students were given the job of blowing up religious buildings, destroying graveyards, and publicly reviling anyone who persisted in religious observances (by what means Newby does not clarify). Today (meaning 1981) Albanian authorities admit to having five thousand prisoners in forced-labor camps. Albanians in exile insist that the figure is closer to forty thousand. One of the worst camps is at Burrel, where a sign over the entrance reads: "This is Burrel Where People Enter But Never Leave."

"There is perhaps no other city in the western world which exists so much out of time . . . ." Newby is here referring not to Corfu and Albania but to Old Fez in Morocco at the other end of the Mediterranean. His statement is anachronistic because Fez is not *in* the western world. If I may be captious, further, it exists out of *our* time but fully in its own, Berber and Arabic; as Newby himself adds, it is one of the most revered localities within the Muslim surround. In any event it is obviously a city of endless fascination which evokes from Newby a throb of poetry, as in this crescendo where he listens, you might say, to the sun coming up over a world we never made.

> Now cocks crow and packs of dogs howl and bark and bite one another . . . just as they did on the outskirts of Cetinje in Montenegro, just as they still do on the outskirts of any oriental city . . . . We can hear them out beyond the walls, in the orange, apricot, pomegranate and olive groves which now invest them at an ever-increasing distance, out there in the *msallas,* the great open-air praying places, out on the stony hillsides where the prickly pears grow, around the strongholds built by various conquerors to dominate the Old City without the necessity of getting too close to it, out among the *kubbas* and the *zawiyas,* the tombs and shrines of the illustrious and saintly dead, tombs around which cults, some of them rather strange cults, have arisen, such as that at the tenth-century tomb of Sidi Boujida, where young wives, swathed in white, who have lost their husbands' esteem, pray to recover it.
>
> Eventually, after what seems an age and the *ábad* has been repeated for the second time, first light seeps into the world away to the east over the northern outliers of the Middle Atlas, and the *muezzins* go into action from the minarets, the only really tall edifices in a city in which there appear to be no buildings of European inspiration at all (apart perhaps from some now long-disused foreign consulates), announcing that "Night has Departed . . . Day Approaches with Light and Brightness . . . Prayer is Better than Sleep."

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Surely it is for just such passages that we read travel books. While we may be only ruefully grateful for being supplied in documentary detail with the awful truth about Venice, the Camorra in Naples, and a Gulag peninsula fronting the Ionian Sea, we wait for those moments when the travelling author has depended most fully upon his own instinct for the equivocal sensation he wants to convey. And contrary to the sentiment expressed by E. M. Forster, that sensation is the more compelling—the more exotic—if, to the cultural assumption we cannot sensibly live without, there is added a tinge of the barely comprehensible, the forever alien. In the sequence above it is perhaps gathered up in that strange cry, "Prayer is better than sleep."

Newby is at his best—I suppose any travel writer is likely to be—when he is telling us not what he has learned but what he has seen, the unedited images that occur before he sorts them out and adds research to observation. Newby has a ready response to group diversity and to the animation which it generates. In Jerusalem, for example, he finds a host of sects "giving tongue, buying and selling, praying, reading sacred and not-so-sacred works, listening to taped music, teaching the living, tending the dying, calling the faithful to prayer, quarrelling, picking pockets . . . . begging, cooking and eating, digging their plots, feeding their hens, their flocks of sheep, their donkeys and their camels—all of which are also from time to time giving tongue—or simply waiting for the Second Coming." He is no less effective, and second only to Graham Greene, when describing desolations: Kotor, in Montenegro, stricken by an earthquake; unexploded mines still lurking in the deserts of Libya; the Awful Hotel, that phenomenon as universal as death and taxes, exemplified here by the Yala in Tobruk (where Newby had helped fight a war), so named following the Revolution in Libya (Yala, Newby was assured, means Go Home, British!).

The Mediterranean today as a metaphor of reason and harmony is not confirmed by Newby's personal ventures to its periphery, and this would be an unconsoling experience to read did he not, for compensation, regale us with the *contingencies* of travel. The contingent is synonymous with the notable and the notable spells life. And life spells food. Alone among travellers in the literature, Newby is not content to recall, with justifiable depression, the lower depths of cuisine to which all tourists to the remote are sooner or later subjected. He rises to those superlative occasions which remind us that perhaps nothing is more indicative of civilization ("the harmony between the works of man and the earth that upholds them") than the meal as a work of art. With conscious irony and without apology for the extravagance he was, by some means, free to indulge, he concludes his travel episodes with what can best be called a baroque recollection, designed to activate the gourmet reader's gastric juices, of a feast (beginning with truffles and pigeon's breast and ending with salmon and wild strawberries) consumed at the principal restaurant of the Negresco hotel in Nice, among the last of a dying order: the *hôtels-palais* axis on the French Riviera.

Chilling observations

Gjertrud Schnackenberg The Lamplit Answer. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 83 pages, $12.95

reviewed by Robert Richman

This eagerly awaited book, by a young, gifted poet, is not quite all it was hoped it would be. No doubt expectations were too high to begin with. Thirty-three-year-old Gjertrud Schnackenberg has already received many major prizes in her short career as a poet, and her first book—chapbook, really—entitled *Portraits and Elegies* (1982), was widely praised. All this may have led us to believe, quite unfairly, that this would be a faultless book. Unfortunately, it isn't. There are some wonderful things here. But the author has chosen to include, among the

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many formal poems that are her real distinction, a small group of rather lackluster confessional works. No doubt Schnackenberg hoped these poems would inject a personal element into what she may have felt was a decidedly impersonal collection. Whatever her intention, these poems largely fail, not because they are confessional, but because they are quite simply inferior in quality. Some of them, addressed to an absent lover, could be the ordinary scribbles of any love-struck undergraduate. They almost capsize the book.

They don't, fortunately. The reason is that the greater part of *The Lamplit Answer* is devoted to poems of a different sort, best typified by the volume's long opening poem, the extraordinary "Kremlin of Smoke." Schnackenberg is at her best spinning elaborate, imaginative webs around ideas, stories, and historical figures. This talent is nowhere better displayed than in this poem. Her subject is Chopin, his childhood in Warsaw and his days as the bright young thing of the glittering Paris salons. In the first scene we see the genius stooping low to entertain some frivolous guests:

> The swan's neck of the teacup, her black
> vizard
> Plunged underwing, conceals her face like a
> modest cocotte
> Who can't bring herself to look up at the
> honored guest,
> As the silver hammer of the tea service
> practices
> *Chings* in runs of triplets, and the tea steam
> hangs
> Phantom chrysanthemums on long,
> evaporating stems
> In the air of the winter apartment. The
> guests,
> Having gathered for games, for mimicries,
> For gossip's intricate, expensive inventions,
> Crowd toward the pianist who, leaning
> forward,
> Clasps his hands, like a child's prison for
> butterflies,
> To begin a tale, perfected in his room,
> of his
> Reception on a tour in the South, where they
> had hired
> A sedan chair with servants to bear him to
> the theater,
> "Like a captured king from a remote, Saxon
> metropolis,"
> And then killed him in the reviews—a
> smashing joke,
> And his hostess snaps her fan shut when she
> laughs,
> In a city of slaves to mirrors, of rivalries
> Championed for less than a day by
> charlatans . . . .

But Chopin's outer gaiety conceals a deeply tormented soul. The cause of this torment is the recent Russian invasion of Poland. (Warsaw fell in 1831.) Here the plundering soldiers ransack Chopin's Warsaw apartment while the pampered genius, "[s]urrounded by . . . yards of silk" in his Paris flat, "struggle[s] to restrain his brimming tears":

> . . . from the fourth-floor window of a house
> In Warsaw occupied by Russian soldiers,
> The soldiers on a lark have seized and hurled,
> As if thunder itself turned visible,
> Chopin's piano crashing to the street,
> And burned the wreck . . . .

"Kremlin of Smoke," like its protagonist, has a deeper reality. Beneath the polished surface of the poem lies an allegory of contemporary Poland, the scene of a similar subjugation by Russian lackeys a hundred and fifty years after the invasion that caused Chopin's anguish. "Kremlin of Smoke" is not the "silver tray/Of showy blossoms" it appears to be. It contains a stinging political indictment that is effective precisely because it is never directly stated in the poem.

There is much more to "Kremlin of Smoke." For example, the musical genius who was "stolen" by the "piano gods" for the benefit of "bespectacled millionaire guests" and "old/Legitimist Bourbons" brings to mind every beleagured artist who ever had to ply his wares before an uncomprehending, unappreciative audience. (Cho-

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pin's guests, we will recall, were gathered not to hear music, but "for games, for mimicries,/For gossip's intricate, expensive inventions.") And when the pianist describes himself, in the journal entry that constitutes the final sequence of the poem, as "an outcome withering from my cause," the chilling observation applies equally well to the political and artistic exiles of our own day.

"Kremlin of Smoke" succeeds so well because the poet is able to achieve the verbal inventiveness her conceit demands. This is true of other poems in the collection as well. The governing conceit in "Darwin in 1881"—the likening of Darwin to Prospero—is just as compelling as the one in "Kremlin of Smoke," and the results are equally rewarding:

> Sleepless as Prospero back in his bedroom
> In Milan, with all his miracles
> Reduced to sailors' tales,
> He sits up in the dark. The islands loom.
> His seasickness upwells,
> Silence creeps by in memory as it crept
> By him on water, while the sailors slept,
> From broken eggs and vacant tortoise shells.
> His voyage around the cape of middle age
> Comes, with a feat of insight, to a close,
> The same way Prospero's
> Ended before he left the stage
> To be led home across the blue-white sea,
> When he had spoken of the clouds and globe,
> Breaking his wand, and taking off his robe:
> Knowledge increases unreality.

The great thinker who meditated on species' ends is, at the end of his own life—like Prospero, at the end of *The Tempest*—a beautifully diminished figure. Schnackenberg's gentle relinquishing of her lines to the "necessity" of rhyme and meter mirrors perfectly Darwin's slow surrender to the universe whose secrets he strove to understand:

> By hook and plume
> The seeds gathering on his trouser legs
> Are archipelagoes, like nests he sees
> Shadowed in branching, ramifying trees,
> Each with unique expressions in its eggs.
> Different islands conjure
> Different beings; different beings call
> From different isles. And after all
> His scrutiny of Nature
> All he can see
> Is how it will grow small, fade, disappear,
> A coastline fading from a traveler
> Aboard a survey ship. Slowly,
> As coasts depart,
> Nature had left behind a naturalist
> Bound for a place where species don't exist,
> Where no emergence has a counterpart.

These lines bring to mind Donald Justice's magnificent poem, "Last Days of Prospero," in which the "aging magician"—who had caused "tempests" and "[l]oosed . . . lightnings . . . in the rigging of the world"—chooses to spend his twilight years listening to the "grand, indifferent sighs" of the waves lapping at the shore. Schnackenberg's hero has a similar fate. Darwin declines to accept an award and chooses instead to spend the evening staying "up rather late/For backgammon with his beloved mate,/Who reads his books and is, quite frankly, bored." Schnackenberg's preoccupation, here as in "Kremlin of Smoke" (and indeed, throughout *The Lamplit Answer*), is the vulnerability that is always at the core of greatness.

"The Heavenly Feast" is also concerned with the truth behind appearances. The poem is dedicated to the memory of Simone Weil, the French writer who died at the age of thirty-four as the result of self-imposed privation during World War II. But here the "reality" the poet reveals by means of metaphor and subtle suggestion is not that of Simone Weil, though she is Schnackenberg's ostensible subject. Instead, Schnackenberg uses Weil's life to expose the truth behind art. The "heavenly feast" of the afterlife—the feast Weil sought, and which she felt could only be achieved through earthly suffering—is, for Schnackenberg, a metaphor for poetry, whose perfection and simplicity is only realized through the greatest labor. The finch that "toil[s] to paraphrase" Weil's message in these lines is none other than the poet herself:

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Only the stones at first

Seem to have a part in this,
And the little height of the grass
As it gains a fraction-inch.
But hidden in the grass

As if the grass itself
Were giving out a cry,
I overhear a finch
Begin her native rhyme

And toil to paraphrase
Her version of your words.
It seems she tries and tries
Until the words come clear, ...

But Schnackenberg's obsession with ripping down façades backfires slightly in the final section of her book. In an attempt to reveal her own inner essence, Schnackenberg writes some rather feeble lines:

Dear love, though I'm a hopeless
correspondent,
I found your letter habits lacking too
Till I received your card from H.-lulu.
It made me more-than-slightly-less despondent
To see how you transformed your ocean swim
Among dumb bubble-blowers into meters
And daffy rhymes about exotic tweeters
Beyond your balcony at 2 a.m.

Deep in the throes of love, the poet has "had it up to here/With scrutinizing the inscrutable;/The whys and how-comes of immutable/Unhesitating passion are unclear." The result is an emotional free-for-all only loosely knitted together by rhyme and meter. Interestingly, Schnackenberg seems to admit that this confessional work is something less than inspired: "Come home" she implores her lover, "before I write another line."

It is to be regretted that Gjertrud Schnackenberg did not bring to this material the same kind of fastidious attention that she devotes to her strongest work. But *The Lamplit Answer* is, all the same, a remarkable book.

Getting back to nature

Leon R. Kass, M.D. Toward a More Natural Science: Biology and Human Affairs. Free Press, 370 pages, $23.50

reviewed by Roger Kimball

"Since Copernicus man has been rolling from the center toward *X*."
—*Friedrich Nietzsche*

Near the beginning of his *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1486), the great Italian humanist Pico della Mirandola pictures the creation of the world. The heavens and earth are formed, and the earth is endowed with its complement of plants and animals. Yet when all is done, the divine craftsman still wants someone to behold the splendor and ingenuity of his work. He thus sets about creating man. But since all the "archetypes" have been used, and since every fixed place in the plan of creation has already been filled, he makes man a creature of "indeterminate nature," a creature who would have to depend upon freedom to define himself and his place in the world. "Neither a fixed abode nor a form that is thine alone nor any function peculiar to thyself have We given thee, Adam," Pico has God intone.

> The nature of all other beings is limited and constrained within the bounds of laws prescribed by Us. Thou, constrained by no limits, in accordance with thine own free will, in whose hand We have placed thee, shalt ordain for thyself the limits of thy nature. We have set thee at the world's center that thou mayest from thence more easily observe whatever is in the world. We have made thee neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, so that with freedom of choice and with honor, as though the maker and molder of thyself, thou mayest fashion thyself in whatever shape thou shalt prefer.

Pico's version of Genesis is full of the confidence and heady optimism that fueled the Renaissance. Freedom, power, the notion

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that man has no "set limits" or given nature, that he *creates* his nature and his place in the world—these ideas set Pico in opposition to the tradition that he had inherited. They also prefigure the intellectual revolutions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the revolutions of "the new science," of Copernicus and Galileo, of Bacon, Newton, and Descartes. In seizing the freedom to determine himself, man at the same time begins to assert his freedom in order to take charge of nature.

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of this shift. Since the time of Aristotle science had been essentially a contemplative matter; truth was conceived as a stable order that man strove to *behold.* But in the modern age, science became fundamentally aggressive, inseparable from the project of grasping and manipulating nature—including man's nature—according to human designs. Instead of opening himself up to nature's secrets, man now strove to *reconstruct* those secrets by active intervention. Francis Bacon's celebrated declaration to the effect that "knowledge is power" typifies the new approach.

Nowhere was this new approach more dramatically crystallized—or more systematically worked out—than in the philosophy of Descartes, who can with some justice be considered the architect of modern science. In a famous passage near the end of the *Discourse on Method,* Descartes heralds a "practical philosophy" that, unlike the speculative philosophy of scholasticism, "would show us the energy and action of fire, air, and stars, the heavens, and all other bodies in our environment, as distinctly as we know the various crafts of our artisans, and could apply them in the same way to all appropriate uses and thus make ourselves the masters and owners of nature."

To make ourselves the "masters and owners of nature": that is the goal. The index of knowledge is here not theory but power and control. Like the artisan, we really know something when we know how to make it. And among the benefits that Descartes envisioned from his new philosophy was a more efficacious medicine: by understanding the principles of nature, Descartes wrote, we might hope to control man's physical nature, freeing him from "an infinitude of maladies both of body and mind, and even also possibly of the infirmities of age."

The staggering success of modern science and technology—including modern medical technology—underscores the power and truth of Descartes's vision. What we call the modern world is in a deep sense a Cartesian world, a world in which man has exploited the principles outlined by Descartes to remake reality in his own image. But there is a dark side to this mastery. Increasingly, one confronts the fear that man, despite his technical prowess, may be enslaved by his dominion over nature. Nor is this fear confined to the *effects* of our science, to the lethal arsenal of weapons and pollutants that human ingenuity has scattered over the face of the earth. Equally (if more subtlely) fearsome is the crisis in *values* that modern science has helped to precipitate. Committed to the ideal of objectivity, modern science requires that the world be silent about "values," about meaning in any human sense, for it requires that everyday experience be reduced to the ghostly, "value-free" language of primary qualities and mathematical formulae. While this language has given man great power over the world, it cannot speak to him of his place in the world.

Hence, as Nietzsche saw with devastating clarity, the other side of our commitment to the ideal of objective truth is nihilism. *"All science,"* he wrote in the *Genealogy of Morals,* "has at present the object of dissuading man from his former respect for himself, as if this had been nothing but a bizarre conceit." Since the truth for Nietzsche—as for us as well—means first of all objective, scientific truth, everything that binds us to the world as wanting, lacking, embodied creatures—sexual attraction, beauty, pain, hunger, etc.—must be denied the title of truth. It was precisely this insight that led Nietzsche to insist that "the value of truth must for once be *experimentally called into question.*"

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Leon Kass's *Toward a More Natural Science* is perhaps best seen as continuing the philosopher's questioning of the value of scientific truth. Like Nietzsche, Dr. Kass, a medical doctor and Luce Professor of the Liberal Arts of Human Biology at the University of Chicago, takes as his theme "the relation between the pursuit of knowledge and the conduct of life." Skeptical about "the reasonableness of divorcing science from ordinary experience," Dr. Kass writes in his introduction that "the promise and peril of our time are inextricably linked with the promise and peril of modern science." Yet it is important to emphasize that he aims not to subvert but to supplement science. He does not wish to diminish the achievements of science but "to point out that the teachings and discoveries of science are at best partial—indeed, partial *in principle*."

Unlike those who would blithely reject technology, then, or who would have us view science as a particularly severe form of poetry, Dr. Kass's reflections proceed from a practicing scientist's ingrained respect for the authority of scientific discourse and its practical achievements. Hence, he attempts to dissociate himself from those who would have us invest the term "nature" with a quasi-mythical significance. "'Natural' and 'more natural' mean here only 'true (or "truer") to life' as found and lived," Dr. Kass insists. "The careful reader will find here neither romanticism nor natural law, and no exhortations to eat organic foods."

Written over the course of some fifteen years, the thirteen essays that compose *Toward a More Natural Science* do not advance a single, consecutive argument. Instead, they comprise a series of meditations on the tasks of medicine, the limits of science, and the fate of morality in a culture increasingly dominated by a rational, scientific worldview. Along the way, Dr. Kass also offers us numerous reflections on contemporary culture that, taken together, constitute something of a brief against the widespread assumption that cultural relativism must have the last word. "In our tolerant age," he writes, "we are reluctant to declare another culture's beliefs less worthy or true than our own. Indeed, we are generally quick to criticize as ethnocentric any of our passionately held beliefs—except, of course, for cultural relativism itself, a belief, we generally forget, that is itself culture bound."

Influenced especially by the work of the eminent ethicist Paul Ramsey and by Hans Jonas's essentially Heideggerian critique of science and technology, Dr. Kass argues against the purely utilitarian, instrumental view of medicine—and of man—that modern biology, with its commitment to "value-free" inquiry tends to foster. In particular, he argues "against the use of some technologies, and even more, against the unexamined belief . . . that all biomedical technology is an unmixed blessing." It is not hard to come up with examples of the sort of thing Dr. Kass has in mind: from the artificial prolongation of life to developments in genetic engineering, modern biomedical technology confronts us with a host of ethical quandaries. At bottom, his task is to undermine the ethic that proclaims: If it can be done, it may be done. "We must," he writes, "all get used to the idea that biomedical technology makes possible many things we should never do."

The "more natural" science announced in the book's title tokens a science that is not in thrall to the reductive ideal of objectivity. "Ultimately," writes Dr. Kass,

> our goal is a richer, more comprehensive "new science" of man in relation to the whole. This must be compatible with the findings—if not necessarily the interpretations—of the natural, psychological, and social sciences. But it must also do justice to the full range and complexity of human powers and activities, and it might thus provide some standards for addressing moral and political questions.

Dr. Kass begins by inviting us to think through some of the moral and philosophical dilemmas that modern biomedical technology poses. *In vitro* fertilization and surrogate motherhood, the abortion of genetically defective fetuses, organ transplantation, be-

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havior modification through drugs or surgery, artificial prolongation of life—are such practices morally neutral, to be accepted without question as the results of inevitable technological progress? Or, by challenging our conception of what it means to be human, do they themselves demand challenge? To put the problem more generally, need we revise our understanding of ourselves in light of the new powers that technology has granted us? Or does this threat to our traditional self-understanding require that we rethink our commitment to modern science and technology?

Dr. Kass's main point will not be entirely unfamiliar. "In the end," he writes, "the price of relieving man's estate might well be the abolition of man . . . . We are witnessing the erosion, perhaps the final erosion, of the idea of man as something splendid or divine, and its replacement with a view that sees man, no less than nature, simply as more raw material for manipulation and homogenization." But because his discussion focuses on the way modern biomedical technology has intervened in our lives, Dr. Kass's argument assumes a special immediacy and pathos. For while we live in a world transformed by technology, it is chiefly through medicine that technology impinges directly on our bodies, challenging many traditional notions about the limits of human nature. Since "everything is in principle open to intervention," Dr. Kass observes, and

> because all is alterable, nothing is deemed either respectably natural or unwelcomely unnatural, nothing in principle better or worse. Here lies the deepest danger of the new biology: limitless power—both unlimited in its extent and without clear limits or standards to guide its use.

Toward a More Natural Science is a reflection on the significance of this loss of limits and standards. It is also a search for new criteria to guide medical practice and, ultimately, ethical thought. What Dr. Kass seeks is a medicine concerned as much with ends as with means, as much with values as with techniques. He envisions "a newer and more natural biology, one truer to experience with room, perhaps, for morality and humanity within." Thus while Dr. Kass remains close to Nietzsche in his conceptual foundations, he departs from him in his hope of resuscitating traditional values. Where Nietzsche called for the transvaluation of all values and looked to man in his radical freedom to re-create himself, Dr. Kass hopes to reinvigorate a very traditional image of man by critically examining the philosophical foundations of modern science. This is evident in the way Dr. Kass poses the problems he discusses. "What, for example," he asks,

> does "mother" mean—and what can and should it mean for human affairs—if one woman donates the egg, another houses it for insemination, a third hosts the transferred embryo and gives birth to the baby, a fourth nurses it, a fifth rears it, and a sixth has legal custody? And how is male distinguished from female: Is it by genotype (XX or XY), or external genitalia, or psychological outlook, or sexual preference, or even none of the above because gender can be "reassigned" through reconstructive surgery? What does organ transplantation or surrogate motherhood imply about the relation between a person and his or her body? And, at both ends of a human life, what constitutes the clear and distinct boundary between alive and dead?

These are of course exceedingly complex questions. And, as Dr. Kass acknowledges, we contrive what answers we can not so much on the basis of "facts" as on the basis of a prior moral commitment, a sense of how man fits—and should fit—into the world.

Dr. Kass's own sense of these things is deeply traditional: "Man is defined partly by his origins and his lineage," he asserts; "to be bound up with parents, siblings, ancestors, and descendants is part of what we mean by human. By tampering with and confounding these origins and linkages, we are involved in nothing less than creating a new conception of what it means to be

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human." "What is the significance," he asks, "of divorcing human generation from human sexuality, precisely for the meaning of our bodily natures as male and female, as both gendered and engendering? To be male or to be female derives its deepest meaning only in relation to the other, and therewith in the gender-mated prospects for generation through union."

That such questions are not merely academic is shown in the press everyday—in the recent story in *The New York Times,* for example, about the war against pornography waged by the radical feminist Andrea Dworkin and her "mate" John Stoltenberg. Expressing the noble desire for a world in which gender differences were not the basis for power differences, Mr. Stoltenberg went on to reflect, "in fact, I could really do without gender." Could he really? What would it mean for a creature who is essentially sexual to "do without gender"? Is gender an "accidental" quality—like the color of one's hair, or one's taste in wine? Or consider the popular notion that, as Dr. Kass puts it, "a person has a right over his body, a right that allows him to do whatever he wants to it or with it." Do we really believe that? Would we want to say that a pregnant woman had the "right" to injure a fetus deliberately—by taking a drug she knew to be dangerous, for example? Does our "right" over our own body extend so far that we may deliberately injure ourselves if we wish? Such questions point to the thorny ethical problems that Dr. Kass grapples with in this book.

Unfortunately, one serious impediment to considering many of the issues that Dr. Kass raises is that they are so fraught with ideological baggage that simply to pose them as questions is to risk raising political hackles. Consider only the problem of abortion. Dr. Kass limits his discussion to the ethical grounds for aborting genetically defective fetuses. In brief, he argues that a policy of aborting genetically defective fetuses conflicts with the Constitutional guarantee of equality. But with admirable frankness, he admits that

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> I cannot know with certainty what I would think, feel, do, or want done faced with the knowledge that my wife was carrying a child branded with Down's syndrome or Tay-Sachs disease . . . . We all know that what we and others actually do is often done out of weakness, rather than conviction. It is all too human to make an exception in one's own case.

Nevertheless, it remains true that for many even to question the moral status of abortion—to say nothing of its legal status, which is a separate issue—is tantamount to taking a stand against it.

To my mind, Dr. Kass displays both great resoluteness and delicacy in his treatment of such issues. For his real interest centers not on the desirability of this or that medical practice but on "some large, enduring, and most difficult questions: the nature of justice and the good community; the nature of man and the good for man." Now Dr. Kass has obviously set himself a daunting agenda here, especially in an age that is skeptical of the very intelligibility of notions like "the nature of justice" or "the nature of man." But while he does not always escape the portentousness that such great questions are wont to elicit, it is a testimony to his thoughtfulness that his book succeeds in articulating a powerful challenge to many cherished assumptions about the role of medical science in our lives.

But any book that questions as deeply as *Toward a More Natural Science* does will itself invite question. I suspect that many readers will dismiss Dr. Kass's arguments on political grounds, and this is a pity because the issues he raises transcend the vacillating pieties of ideological fashion. Unfortunately, his occasionally preachy tone will not help him on this front: there are many statements that, taken out of context, might suggest that he is far more programmatic in his views than I believe he is. Further, Dr. Kass is sometimes given to speaking in absolutistic, almost Platonic terms. In his essay on "The End of Medicine and the Pursuit of Health," for example, he justifies excluding many items from medical practice—including, by implication, abortion—by appealing to "the inner meaning of medicine." But is there an "inner meaning of medicine"? Whatever our position on the issues that Dr. Kass raises, mustn't we insist that the "inner meaning of medicine" is determined conventionally, culture by culture, that "medicine" means what its day-to-day practice mandates?

And, more seriously, we must also question Dr. Kass's vision of a "more natural" science. He dreams of a science that could "help us to encounter the mysterious, rather than to explain it away," that could help to restore us "to our proper place *within* nature's kingdom, from which we have exiled ourselves in our audacious, not to say hubristic, project to master and possess it." Granting our audaciousness, hubris, and exile, is it the task of *science* to remedy them? Should we look to science—as Dr. Kass suggests we should—to "provide some standards for moral and political questions"?

Dr. Kass again and again appeals to the richness of "the phenomena"—the richness of lived experience—to counter the reductive, objectifying tendency of modern science. He asks us to attend with fresh eyes to the *appearances* of nature, to the beauty and order of the world around us as it presents itself to our senses. Arguing against science's "deliberately abstracting from the world of ordinary experience," he hopes to find "humanly meaningful clues from nature," to rediscover some connection between "nature and good."

No doubt we would all profit by attending more carefully to nature's gorgeous panoply. But whether we would then discover some lost connection between nature and the good is another question. Nature does indeed speak to us; but does she provide legible clues to our moral duty? Dr. Kass himself disavows the notion that "precise rules of conduct [might be] deducible from even the fullest knowledge of nature—no sensible person holds that such rules can be simply 'read off' from the natural record." But he advances the only slightly less questionable theses that "the ethical,

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rightly considered, might be integral to the natural, . . . [that] the natural, rightly understood, might even provide some guidance for how we are to live."

Dr. Kass's suggestion rests mainly on his quasi-Kantian arguments for viewing nature as a purposive, well-ordered whole. But I am not sure that his arguments here are convincing. One problem is that nature speaks with many, often contradictory voices: the behavior of the black widow spider toward her mate (she eats him) is no less natural than the gentler lessons that Dr. Kass adduces. And at times he seems to go beyond Kant by hinting that the sense of design we impute to nature is not simply a subjective necessity of our mode of thought but is somehow inherent in nature herself. In a way this is not surprising. Kant noted that teleology "finds its consummation only in theology," that our discovery of design in nature issues in a tendency to assume a supreme designer. And there is, I believe, a kind of covert theology lurking behind *Toward a More Natural Science,* especially in the passages dealing with teleology. I doubt, in fact, whether it would have made much difference to Dr. Kass's main point if those theological tenets were made overt. But, especially in a book on the effects of modern science, it is disconcerting to sense such presuppositions playing themselves out, as it were, in the background.

In any case, the real task is not to make science "more natural" in Dr. Kass's sense but to realize that the explanations of science are, as he himself puts it, partial *in principle.* The antidote that Dr. Kass seeks to the dehumanizing effects of modern science will not come from *within* science; it is not to be accomplished by making science more "humanistic" or more sensitive to man's moral nature. Science is not and cannot be a respecter of morality. Nor can it withdraw from the ideal of objectivity without at the same time abdicating its authority. Rather, the antidote will come—if it comes—from us as social, political beings, not as scientists; for it is precisely as social and political beings that we must decide upon the ends and goals that science pursues with such frightening singlemindedness. Not that this is a simple task. But it is we, not our science, who need to be less reductive, more open to the texture of reality. For it is we, not our science, who determine the kind of world we want to live in, and part of that determination is deciding on the role that science and technology are going to play in our lives.

Dr. Kass describes his book as "an invitation to reflection": "[I] mean to provoke questions, not solve problems," he tells us. And *Toward a More Natural Science* is surely at its best when it preserves its probing, interrogative stance. But it would be misleading to pretend that Dr. Kass maintains a dispassionate attitude throughout his inquiry. "Is our growing dominion over living nature compatible with respecting our own given nature?" he asks, communicating a resounding "no" in the very formulation of the question. But just this is the question: do we have a "given" nature? Perhaps, as heirs to Pico's Adam, we are charged with re-creating ourselves—and nature—as we see fit? Perhaps we should strive for "a new conception of what it means to be human"? After all, one might ask, why should we shackle ourselves with a traditional conception of man that has bred prejudice and inequity? Perhaps Nietzsche was wrong to suggest that since Copernicus man has been rolling from the center toward the abyss; perhaps he is merely on his way toward a higher, freer conception of man—an *Übermensch,* as Nietzsche himself would have put it.

Clearly, Dr. Kass is dubious. At stake is nothing less than the traditional image of man as essentially finite, mortal, embodied, tied to others by birth, culture, and a given sexuality. There is no doubt that the Promethean ambitions of modern science, especially modern medical science, challenge that conception of man with a host of problems for which there are no easy answers. Still, it behooves us to ponder them. For as Socrates reminds Glaucon at the beginning of *The Republic,* "It is no ordinary matter we are discussing, but the right conduct of life."

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Letters

Cold-war art history

To the Editors:
Your special issue, "The Arts in America 1945-1985" (Summer, 1985), is a valuable contribution to our understanding and appreciation of the past forty years. I particularly enjoyed the articles on art and music and agree with the points that were made.

The only statement that slightly raised my eyebrow was Hilton Kramer's comment regarding the failure of the American art world to rebut the political attack on postwar Abstract Expressionism as contained, for example, in Serge Guilbaut's *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art.* "Their silence," Mr. Kramer wrote, "can only be accounted for, I think, by their fear of being seen to take an anti-Left position on what is as much a political as a cultural controversy." While the silence is regrettable, I think an equally valid case can be made for a much simpler explanation: that the effort to place a cold-war ideological perspective on American postwar painting is so ridiculous and detached from reality that few if any painters or writers can be bothered to refute it. Putting it another way, if someone wrote a book today suggesting that the earth is flat, could any of our leading scientists be sufficiently exercised to reply?

Donald M. Blinken
New York City

Hilton Kramer replies:
We are pleased that Mr. Blinken has found so much to admire in our special issue on "The Arts in America 1945-1985."

His "simpler explanation" regarding the "failure of the American art world to rebut the political attack" contained in *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* does not seem to account for the facts, however. It is no doubt true that our leading scientists would not respond to a book which claimed the earth to be flat. They would ignore such a book as a fraud, and regard its author as a crank. But the sad truth is that the American art world does not conduct its affairs with a similar devotion to truth—even the truth about its own recent past. The fact is, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* has not been ignored, and its author is not regarded as a crank or a fraud. He has been invited to participate in scholarly conferences at the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art, and his writings on American art are now assigned reading in many university courses in art history. (See, for example, *Pollock and After,* edited by Francis Frascina and published this year by Harper & Row—a book obviously intended for classroom use.) The view that Mr. Blinken rightly regards as "ridiculous" and "detached from reality" is, alas, precisely the view of this subject that is being taught on many campuses and expounded in many journals and academic forums today.

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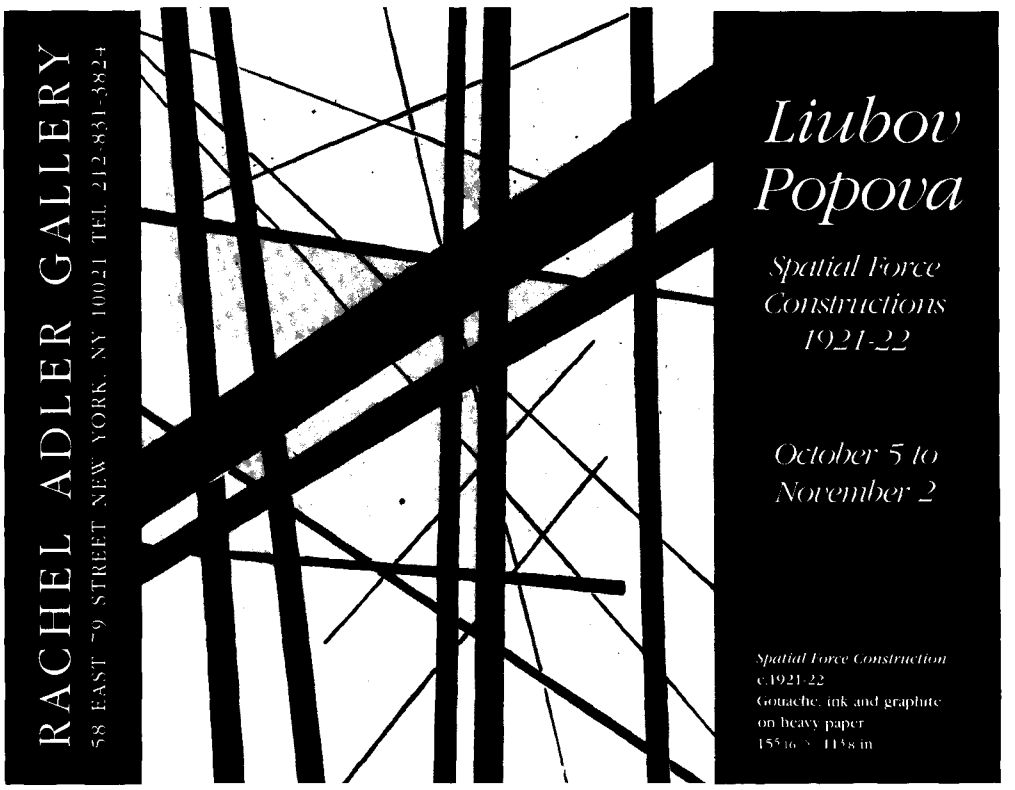
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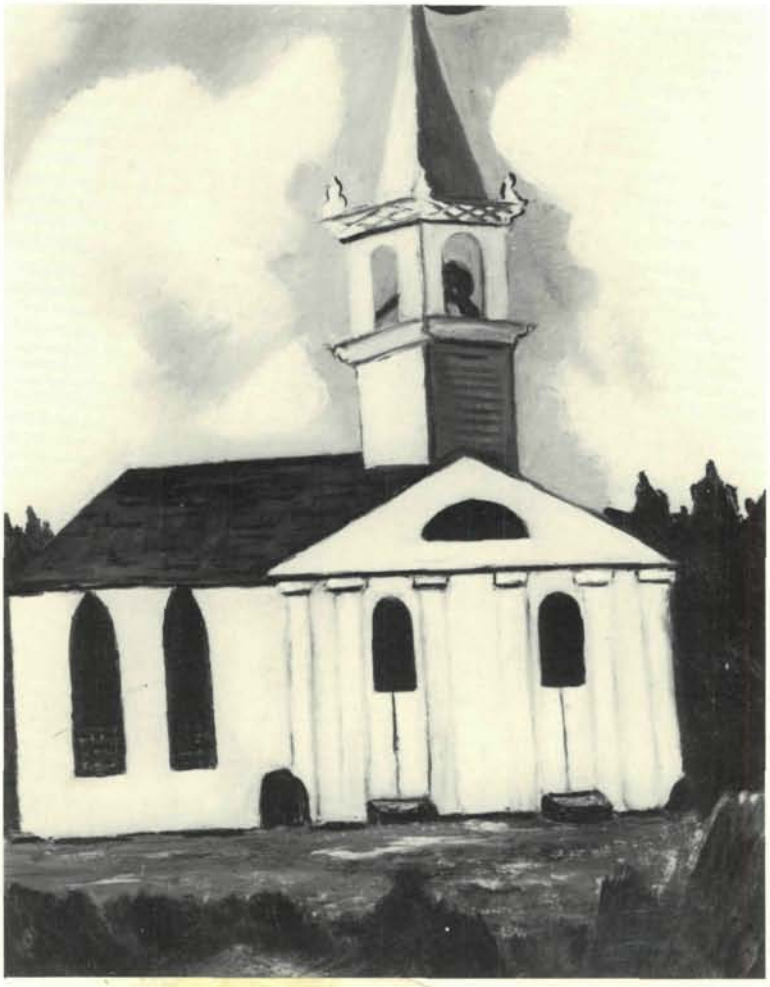

The Church at Head Tide, 1937-38, oil on masonite, 28 x 22 inches

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